

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Volume I

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Volume I



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013

GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA

23rd–27th October 2013

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
from 1987 to 1989*



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Published by Bihar School of Yoga

First published as *On the Wings of the Swan*, Parts I & II 1993

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

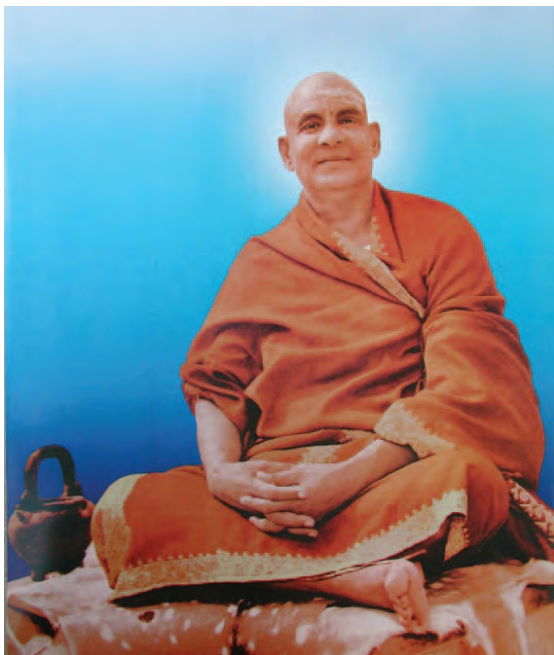
Second edition 2012

ISBN: 978-93-81620-20-5

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

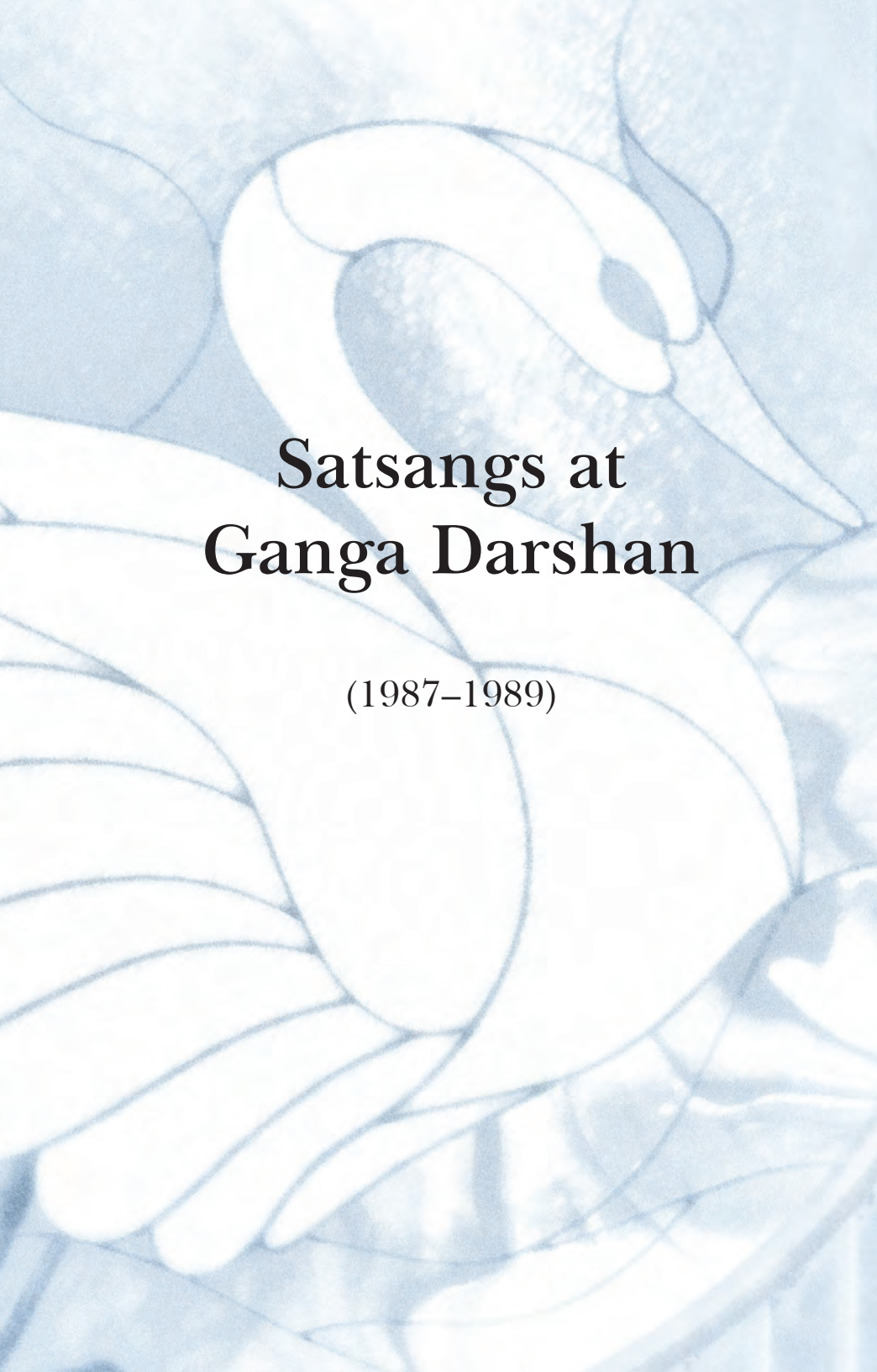
Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(1987–1989)



*Across the stepping stones of self-control
on the banks of the God-intoxicated river,
where flow the waters representing Truth,
over which the waves of compassion dance,
strip yourself naked,
and plunge deep into the purifying current!
Only then will the soul be cleansed
of the effects of the manifest world.*

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

How did yoga originate?

Traditionally, Lord Shiva is considered to be the propagator of the yogic science. He taught the yogas to his first disciple, Parvati, and the tradition has continued since then. Practically speaking, yoga began when man became aware of himself as an individual being; when he discovered that he had a body, that he had systems within the body, that there was an entity within him known as the brain, He decided to investigate further by asking “What am I? Am I only this body? Is my only purpose in life to eat, drink and survive, or is there a greater purpose behind this creation?” This path of self-discovery later transformed itself into yoga.

The word *yoga* means union, knowledge, awareness and understanding. Whatever the divisions of yoga, be it raja yoga, karma yoga, kriya yoga, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga; be it a physiological, mental or spiritual practice, they all lead to one thing: self-discovery. They aim to give you the realization of yourself as an individual, with all your problems and paraphernalia, and to unfold unto you your higher nature or cosmic self.

We are all a part of the same thing and are in a process of constant evolution. Yoga is a progressive path which was developed by progressive minds after they had achieved self-realization, and the yogic tradition is carried forward by different saints, sadhus and sannyasins.

Is the vibration of mantra only effective for the person chanting or does it affect the close family members as well?

It can affect both. When we are dealing with ourselves we have to remember that anything that happens to us is also projected outwards. In yoga, or in spiritual life, nothing is confined to the individual self. Everything is projected, even when we are repeating a mantra alone. Initially, you will have to try to master the mantra. There will be effort from your side. Once you have mastered the science of mantra, and the flow of prana, you can definitely direct your mantra, with the help of prana, to anybody in the world, not only to the family.

There are many stories about psychic healers who can help people from great distances. They can project thoughts and send energy in the form of positive vibrations. This is the result of perfection and mastery. First you have to attain perfection and then you can definitely help others. Why confine it to the family? For a sadhaka, distance is no barrier, thought travels faster than the speed of light and energy is all-pervading. If you can just tap into that source of energy, the prana which is in your body, and know the link between individual prana and universal prana, as well as how to direct your thoughts, you can become a good servant of humanity.

Please remember one thing. Do not become a prophet; do not speak about something which you do not know. I have only given you the basic theory which every sadhaka has to learn. This is a siddhi which the sadhaka attains when he practises yoga. Knowledge of the energies within the personality, knowledge of how to direct them for the benefit of others, and knowledge of the link between the individual 'I' and the cosmic self, this should be the goal of every individual in the world, not only of sannyasins or yoga practitioners.

Is there any difference between mental view and chidakasha?

First, we have to try and understand chidakasha. The literal meaning of *chidakasha* is 'mind space', *chitta* meaning mind and *akasha* meaning space. It is the space which we visualize

when we close our eyes; the dark colour in front of the eyes is considered to be chidakasha.

According to yoga, all mental activity takes place in chidakasha, because in yoga we believe that every thought, feeling, emotion and mental process has a particular form, colour and shape, that is to say, it has particular attributes attached to it. We may not be able to see the thoughts because they happen on a different wavelength, at a different frequency, but it is possible to see the corresponding shape, colour and image of the thought in chidakasha.

How do you think? Do you think in the form of a sentence which comes up in the mind and goes away like a type-written sentence? Or do you think in the form of someone speaking to you mentally? Or do you visualize something and attribute your thought to that image? For example, you know that mountains are beautiful. Do you actually see the mountains and then the thought comes that they are beautiful? What is the thought process?

Every individual thinks differently. Some think as if somebody is speaking in their head. Others think as if somebody is writing something or they see that written word, and sometimes people see images. We all undergo these different processes at different times, but the normal pattern of one's thinking is usually of the same type; it does not change. This we can attribute also to the left and right hemispherical activity of the brain. Artistic people think in a particular way and highly intellectual people think differently again – linear thinking, circular thinking, etc. A thought form is a form of energy, and energy is constantly changing and moving, taking a new shape, a new colour and a new image. Every type of mental function projects itself in the outer world in the form of a colour, or a shape, or a symbol, or any other visual experience that we might have. The dimension in which we experience the visual aspect of mental energy is known as chidakasha.

Now about the mental image. One can fantasize about anything. Sitting still we can fantasize that we are on some

distant planet. We can even see a proper image of ourselves in a spaceship, travelling in a rocket or walking on a distant planet. Now, whether it is fantasy or just thought, the same process is happening inside. Thoughts are being created by the thinking process. Different frequencies are being created by this process of fantasy or visualization, and different colours and symbols are also being projected from the realm of thought to the realm of the sub-conscious and unconscious mind.

Therefore, this is the meaning of chidakasha: having the visual experience of a particular thought and frequency in the mind. As long as your mind is active, experiences will continue to happen in the realm of chidakasha.

The mental view, or thinking space, is different from chidakasha, because in the thinking space you create a thought while in chidakasha you experience it.

According to Patanjali, prior to asana and pranayama come the practices of yama and niyama. Is it possible to practise the other aspects of yoga without first fulfilling the requirements of the yama and niyama?

According to the eight-fold path of yoga, yama and niyama come as parts one and two, asana and pranayama as parts three and four, pratyahara and dharana as parts five and six, and dhyana and samadhi as parts seven and eight. However, in practical life today yama and niyama can be effectively practised after there has been some kind of mental and psychic integration, that is, after the practices of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana.

Broadly speaking, the concepts of yama and niyama are: *satya*, truthfulness; *asteya*, honesty; *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness; *swadhyaya*, self-analysis; *Ishwara pranidhana*, faith; *brahmacharya*, celibacy; *tapasya*, austerity; and *shaucha*, cleanliness.

When Patanjali was questioned, "What is yoga?" in the first statement, or *sutra*, he simply said, "Yoga is a form of discipline." When he was asked again, "What kind of discipline?" he replied, "It is the control of the modifications

of the mind.” So, first a certain spiritual discipline should be formulated, which is both external and internal, in order to overcome these fluctuating tendencies of the mind, known as *vruttis*. Until integration and purification has taken place, the system of yoga is incomplete.

We must also understand another point, that the inspiration to pursue the path of yama and niyama is not superimposed, but is self-generated from a state where the mind and spirit are in unity. Throughout life we have heard that we should be compassionate, we should be truthful, we should not harm anybody and so forth, but we are unable to follow these dictates because of various situations, created by society, which become detrimental to the growth of our positive faculties. The yama and niyama represent the positive expression of our personality.

People come to yoga for many different reasons. Not everybody comes in order to control the *vruttis* of the mind, and not everybody comes in order to evolve spiritually. Each individual has a different requirement according to their stage of evolution. One of the basic requirements of life is maintaining a healthy body. Other requirements are mental peace, balance and tranquillity, a tension-free mind, finding internal happiness, contentment, satisfaction, joy and bliss. Thus, the needs of an individual are categorized as physical first, psychological second and spiritual third. You may fall into this categorization or you may not, but in general, the world follows this system.

In the Satyananda system of yoga there has been a slight change in the order of the eight-fold system of Patanjali. Asana and pranayama become the first and second steps which give an understanding of *annamaya kosha*, the experience of matter, and *pranamaya kosha*, the experience of energy. The balancing of the whole system of matter and energy is brought about through the practices of asana and pranayama. In the third and fourth steps, we utilize the practices of pratyahara and dharana in order to elevate the mind to a point where it can go through a

process of integration with body and spirit – a process of self-observation, of becoming aware of the panorama of life, and of learning how to develop the mental faculties and concentrate the mind so it does not fluctuate. Pratyahara and dharana help to balance the activities of the *manomaya kosha*, the experience of the mind, and of the *vigyanamaya kosha*, the experience of the external and higher intellect. So, in these four stages, hopefully some kind of integration will take place, some kind of purification.

After attaining purification and integration of our life and personality, the fifth and sixth stages become the yama and niyama, where the positive qualities begin to manifest gradually, naturally and spontaneously. When one has achieved a sense of balance they are no longer superimposed disciplines. Rather, they are manifest disciplines. The yama and niyama then become the spontaneous expressions and disciplines of life – the end result of an integrated personality. When these qualities or energies are manifesting, then it is natural for the mind and spirit to move into a meditative state which later on is transformed into samadhi. So, keeping this in mind, the system of yoga prescribed by Patanjali has been modified by Sri Swamiji according to the different needs of today.

The systems of ashtanga yoga do not apply to every individual all the time, mainly because we all have different personalities. Modern psychology and yogic psychology categorize the personality into four types. First is the dynamic personality – active, outgoing, expressive. Second is the emotional personality – feeling, dedicating, surrendering. Third is the intellectual personality: analyzing, rationalizing, categorizing and understanding. Fourth is the psychic personality: awareness of the deeper and spiritual aspect of being. If we try to follow the system of ashtanga yoga with these different personalities, we might come up against some kind of barrier.

For a person who is emotional in nature, asana and pranayama may have no meaning whatsoever. This type

of personality would feel an affinity with the practices of bhakti yoga – devotion, the ability to surrender, the ability to experience the divine nature. With this devotional integrity, the aspects of yama and niyama will manifest spontaneously and it will not be necessary for them to practise asana, pranayama or pratyahara. Dharana and dhyana will take place naturally.

Then we have the dynamic personality, outgoing and expressive. This type can practise hatha yoga for purification, because they will feel more affinity with these practices. They can also practise raja yoga, and perhaps bhakti yoga, depending on whether this aspect is developed in them or not.

For a person who is intellectual there are the practices of jnana yoga. For an intellectual person it may be difficult to understand the process of bhakti, because bhakti is definitely not intellectual. It concerns feeling; feeling oneness with a divine power.

For the psychic nature there are the practices of dhyana. In the state of dhyana the aspects of yama and niyama, pratyahara, dharana and samadhi will flower naturally and spontaneously. It may not even be necessary for them to practise asana and pranayama, neti and kunjla, basti, dhauti and shankhaprakshalana – the hatha yoga techniques.

Therefore, yoga is not just one system or path. There is not just one stamp which is applicable to each and every individual. It changes according to individual need, but the end result is always the same – fulfilment. In the end all the yogas become integrated with each other.

Is there any particular practice that you would recommend us to do as a discipline throughout our life?

If there has to be any discipline at all in one's life, it should be the discipline of yoga. Another definition of yoga is discipline. It means a form of discipline which makes us aware of every action and reaction on the gross, material, external plane, and at the same time on the subtle, spiritual,

internal plane. Of course, it is important to practice asana for the body, pranayama for the brain, and relaxation and concentration for the mind.

Devote at least half an hour to such yoga practice, and the rest of the time, simply try to observe yourself. Be aware of what you are doing and how best you can do it, so that one part of the consciousness is always watching, but is not involved in mundane affairs. Right now, our total consciousness is involved, but if this separation could take place and one part of the consciousness could observe everything that we are doing (working, sleeping, drinking, talking, etc.), then that would be the best form of yogic discipline. This would lead to a better expression of our personality and a deeper understanding of our limitations and abilities.

Why are we not allowed to chant *Saundarya Lahari* with the swamis?

You are a primary and secondary school student asking to join the university class with your big brother. You cannot join the university class yet. First pass through the other classes.

The ancient traditions of yoga, Samkhya, tantra and Vedanta have viewed every effort of the individual to grow and develop as a form of sadhana. *Sadhana* in English means an effort that we make to grow spiritually and develop the creative aspect of our personality. Sadhana may take a different form for different individuals.

Generally, people associate a philosophy with a system of ritual. The direction of all philosophy is the same, towards self-knowledge or self-realization. The ritualistic aspects that we find today, such as going to temples, churches or mosques to perform prayers, are external forms of worship, or external sadhana. Apart from this external ritual there is also an internal effort which is prescribed by yoga, tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya. In the quietness of the mind and spirit, you sit for meditation and discover yourself.

It can be in the form of *bhakti yoga*, devotion or *jnana yoga*, analysis and observation. There is also *raja yoga* which gradually transforms one's personality, behaviour, speech, expressions and control over the different activities and faculties of mind.

Apart from these kinds of sadhana taught in the ashram, there are also tantric sadhanas which are part of a different structure involving the use of mantra, yantra and mandala.

Unfortunately, people tend to associate mantra and yantra with some kind of religious belief or worship. Yoga and tantra, however, say that mantras are sounds which influence and alter the subtle expressions of our personality by working on the vibratory aspect of our inner being, the *nada*. Yantras work in the same manner. The greater part of our perception of the external world is visual, symbolic. The information which we receive through our eyes affects our subconscious and unconscious mind also. Mantra and yantra aim to provide a base for the awakening of the faculties which are lying dormant in the subconscious and unconscious mind.

Yoga gradually directs the attention of the *sadhaka*, or practitioner, towards self-discovery. When we reach the area of life where self-discovery begins, then we enter the realm of tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya. For many people this journey may not begin at all. If we are over-concerned about our body, illnesses, diseases, emotional and psychological conflicts, tensions, stress, anxiety and the other manifestations of our mind and psyche, and occupy ourselves in trying to correct all these externalized manifestations of mind, then we may not even begin the spiritual journey. We are simply trying to become aware of the waves that are created on the surface of the ocean. We are trying to see how they affect our creativity, actions and performance in day-to-day life, and to improve it.

There are, however, *sadhakas* with a spiritual tendency and background who wish to go beyond the experiences of the mind and discover the underlying principle of the spirit

or *atma*. For them, the form of sadhana gradually changes according to their need and understanding, and they may adopt a particular scheme in their life. In this way they transcend the ego-identity, they fuse and merge the identity of 'I' with the higher consciousness. They may adopt bhakti yoga, jnana yoga or other systems of yoga and thus step into the systems of tantra and other practical systems.

We are introduced to these advanced techniques in yoga in the form of mantra chanting, trataka, concentration and visualization techniques. We may begin our practice with repetition of our personal mantra, then later repeat it with awareness of our symbol, and this process gains momentum as we add techniques of other systems.

Over the years, sannyasins have been involved in a lot of head-tripping here in the ashram and have gone through long periods of soul-searching. They have been subjected continuously to hard karma yoga with all its difficulties. At the same time they have had to face their own minds and natures and have also had to learn how to deal with the expressions of other people's personalities.

This hard and intense tantric sadhana of *Saundarya Lahari* is slowly being introduced to them in the form of yantra visualization and chanting of a string of mantras which do not awaken the chakras but work on the deeper layers of the psyche. The chanting of *Saundarya Lahari* was introduced by Sri Swamiji for the sannyasins. You may hear the chanting from outside, but as long as you do not know the process, it makes no difference.

There are many different kinds of sadhana in the tantric system. We are mainly aware of two: right-hand tantra and left-hand tantra. There are techniques of meditation, concentration and self-discovery which have the ability to materialize and manifest the human psyche in a form which is visible to the practitioner. We experience fear. Tantra says it has a form, a body. Similarly, anger and other mental states have a form, a shape, a body. Do we have the ability to manifest or materialize that shape in front of us and see it?

You have heard of the graveyard sadhanas in which Shakti manifests herself as various deities in human form and appears in front of the sadhaka. Only the sadhaka is able to see them, others cannot. These are the experiences of our psyche, the energies which manipulate and control our mind and expression. We may think that the *Saundarya Lahari* sadhana is only the chanting of mantra and simply concentrating on a particular yantra, but it is not just that; it goes deeper than what we can perceive externally.

When the process is complete we experience and see, and even fight with, whatever we are feeling inside. If I feel fear, that fear will assume a form which I will be able to see as I see each now. Similarly, the feeling of love has a body. This is the concept behind the ten heads of Ravana. Every experience in creation has a shape, a form, a palpable body, something we can touch and feel. This is the extent of tantric sadhana. *Saundarya Lahari* was selected as a first step into this realm by Sri Swamiji. Since it is an intense practice, extending over a period of many years, maybe a whole lifetime, we do not wish others to join in.

Do all yogis have an awakened kundalini?

All yogis have experienced the awakening of the kundalini at a certain stage of their sadhana. However, depending on the intensity of their sadhana, they have either been able to fully awaken the kundalini and take it up to sahasrara or not. Kundalini awakens in mooladhara, and some yogis are able to take this energy right up to *brahmarandhra*, sahasrara. Others simply bring it up to *ajna*, the command centre. Some only manage to raise it to *vishuddhi*, the centre of purification, or *anahata*, the centre of developing compassion and love for all.

Each yogi has a definite function to perform in his lifetime. He has been given a mission, and depending on the mission that is revealed to him in meditation, he raises the kundalini, awakens the chakras, and utilizes the awakened faculties of the chakra for the benefit of others. While all sincere yogis

experience kundalini awakening, very few, maybe five in a hundred, are able to take it right up to sahasrara, where the complete union of Shakti with Shiva takes place.

What are the prospects for people like us?

You have a better chance than many of the gurus and sannyasins; because a guru depends on his own inner strength, whereas the disciple depends on the strength of the guru. Through initiation, *diksha*, a guru can awaken the shakti in a disciple. If you read the tantric scriptures, you will find that there are thirty-eight different forms of initiation. Diksha is only one form of initiation. Shaktipat, which we hear so much about nowadays, is another form. Besides these, the guru can awaken the kundalini in the disciple by sight, touch, sound, and many other means. If he wishes, he can awaken the kundalini in large groups of people. Thus, we have better prospects than the gurus themselves.

How should we control children, and how can we bring them to the right path?

Before you do that, you have to control yourself, and bring yourself to the right path. You have to be an example for your children. It is only through example and practical experience that you can instruct your children to develop their potential and creative nature. Preaching without practising is no good. Merely teaching a child all about morality, telling him not to do something while continuing to do it yourself, will not help him improve. Children are very observant, they are very pliable and you can mould them into any shape.

The first thing to do in order to improve the quality of the child's consciousness and awareness is to let him express himself freely. Even if he comes to abuse you, let him. If you cannot let him abuse you, you are suppressing his nature. If you allow his mind to flourish by giving him the freedom of expression, whether verbal, moral, physical or intellectual, he will grow up to be a very intelligent and creative person.

Many children come to the Munger ashram. They stay here for one to five years. Then they go back home, and when they return they decide to stay on and become sannyasins. At the ashram children have complete freedom of expression. They can do anything; they can abuse you and you cannot say anything to them. They can be very gentle, like angels, and they can be very naughty, like Dennis the Menace.

Freedom of expression is important and must to be accompanied by proper samskaras. Proper samskaras are learnt through the practice of asana and pranayama, gradually leading to the different practices and principles of yoga so that the children are able to build a very solid foundation for their future. If they begin to practise yoga from a very early age you will find that in their later lives, they will not face the same type of tension and frustration that you face. Even if they do, they will be equipped to handle those situations which you are not able to handle yourself because you have never been given the basic training.

If you want to bring your child to the right path, give him this basic yoga training which will enable him to cope with all eventualities.

How can we keep good health, produce good children and be happy in life?

There is a one-word answer – yoga! In order to have good health, good offspring, and a good lifestyle, regardless of what kind of life you lead, whether you are rich or poor, whether you have all the comforts of life or you live in the streets, if you can control your mental faculties, you can control anything in life.

With the awakening and development of the mental faculties you become aware of your physiological and inner requirements, and this process of ‘becoming’ then motivates you to transform your life, and find satisfaction under any condition and in every situation. So just keep up with your practice of yoga.

Sri Swamiji says that we must leave our ego behind, or else nothing is possible in the relationship between guru and disciple. When does this take place, after kundalini awakening or at the time of atma dhyana?

Ego destruction does not necessarily happen at the time of kundalini awakening or at the time of atma dhyana. The destruction of ego is a spontaneous process in the evolution of consciousness and can take place under any circumstance, at any time. We are not going to talk about transcending anything, because to eliminate the ego we do not have to transcend anything. To eliminate the ego we just have to reverse the face of the coin. If I feel negative and I try to be positive, it is a method of eliminating the ego. Reversing the experiences of life, whatever they may be, from negative to positive or from positive to negative and then finding the balance between the two, is known as elimination of ego.

Ego is identification with everything in relation to 'me', 'myself'. The concept of duality is predominant when ego is around. When, for example, we begin to meditate and have good experiences, we accept meditation as something good for us. If we have bad experiences, we think, "No, this is not good. It is better that I stop my meditation because I am not improving." There are a few concepts involved. First, there is what we can accept and what we cannot accept. Second, there is ignorance concerning our own nature. Third, there is an inability to understand that within the structure of a human being, lay both negative and positive qualities. Of course, we want to develop only positive qualities and ignore the negative, but that is a very lopsided view in regards to the growth of the personality.

If we only want goodness then we will find goodness, but we would not be allowing the process of purification to change our inner being. Instead, we store away all the bad things and suddenly, one day – bang! There is an explosion. Then others begin to wonder why this person who has been practising yoga for the last fifty years, this spiritually evolved person, suddenly turns negative overnight and falls to the

ground with a big crash, causing earthquakes all over the place! It has happened to many people, because although they gave expression to their good and positive qualities, they neglected their negative aspects such as desire and ambition, inherent within them.

If we are aware of the positive side of our nature, we must also be aware of the negative side, in order to create a balance between these two expressions of *ahamkara*, ego. If you are negative you only have to reverse the coin and become positive and balanced. If you are positive you have to reverse the coin and become negative and balanced. Once you are able to find this balance point between the two expressions of *ahamkara*, then negativity will have no hold on you. This is because the ego is simply illusion, *maya*, according to the philosophy of Vedanta.

There is, according to our minds and our desire for pleasure, attraction to what is acceptable to us and repulsion from that which is not acceptable. When we talk of *ahamkara* we are also talking about *maya*, illusion, which motivates and guides our day-to-day human perceptions. This happens even if we have awakened the kundalini, and even if we have awakened *atma dhyana*.

It is easy to receive the fruits of *sadhana* in spiritual life but difficult to digest them. You can attain *siddhis*, but to digest them is very hard. If you do not have stamina, you will have constipation, diarrhoea, even after *samadhi*. What is the use of eating something and then suffering? Therefore, the guru says that the ego must be removed first. To remove the ego, the guru devises suitable methods according to the different temperaments, ways of thinking and personalities of his disciples.

Some people come to the ashram with great joy and happiness, saying, "Oh, I am going to live with the guru!" After living here for six months they say, "Oh, I am wasting my time here!" All their negativity swells up from within and they do not realize that something has triggered it off. I am sure the guru does not enjoy seeing you suffer, or

listening to your problems day in and day out. However, the guru creates an environment where you are free to confront the different realities of life. If you can go through that stage, the sun will continue to shine. The guru can pull clouds in front of the sun and make you all depressed and downcast. You look at the sky and see thunder and rain, but according to the laws of Nature, clouds do not cover the sun for a whole lifetime. It may be for one hour, two hours, or one day, and if it is England maybe even twelve months, but in twelve months, at least for one hour the sun will shine, and that hour of sunshine is the most pleasurable time of life.

What is the significance of a crystal mala? Can a person who has recently taken a mantra from Sri Swamiji use this mala and what are the effects?

Malas have a positive vibratory effect on the physical body, whether they are made of wood, stone, crystal or any other material. By wearing or utilizing a mala one is able to experience an effect, either in a very subtle or very dramatic way.

We utilize only three types of mala in yoga. First is the tulsi mala, which is made from the wood of the tulsi tree and it is the only wood mala we use. Second is rudraksha, which is the only fruit seed mala that we use. They are very special malas, which have particular vibrations and attributes attached to them. Third is the crystal mala. Crystal is considered to be the highest quality stone, because it has the ability to retain, concentrate and solidify energy. If we study the history of ancient civilizations we will find that they also used crystals for many things. People are doing a lot of research on crystal and finding new things about it practically every day.

There is one very important quality of the crystal mala. It is advised that with tulsi and rudraksha malas you utilize a different mala for japa than the one you wear, because there is a tendency for the energy to be released from tulsi and rudraksha if somebody else touches it; the vibrations are lost

very quickly. However, this does not happen with the crystal mala. You can both wear it and utilize it for japa. One can practise japa with the crystal mala without any difficulty. Even if you have been given a tulsi mala at the time of initiation, it does not matter. You can practise japa with a crystal mala.

It is very difficult to define the difference in vibration of the different malas, but we have found that tulsi and rudraksha malas respond to physical conditions. A Kirlian photograph was taken of a tulsi mala after japa and the result showed that the radius of the energy was about one inch around each bead. Then five or six people were asked to handle it, and again a photograph was taken. The aura had reduced to minimal. The same thing happened with rudraksha. At the time of japa the aura of the mala increased, and after being handled by five or six different people, it had reduced. This was the case with other malas as well, like sandalwood. However, when the same experiment was tried with crystal, the aura remained the same, even after many people had handled it. It did not diminish in size as the other malas had done.

The effects of the tulsi mala are very sattvic and tranquilizing and those people who are highly strung and very emotional, not rational, will benefit from their use. The rudraksha mala is good for overly introverted people and also very psychic people as they maintain a balance in their consciousness. The crystal mala can be used by both without restriction. Tulsi has a very sattvic benefit and rudraksha has a positive rajasic benefit. Rudraksha malas are also considered very good for high blood pressure. They relax the negative inputs and outputs of the personality and at the same time raise the level of energy.

The journey looks difficult and lonesome, the goal very far away; what do we do at times like this?

There should be only one principle in life. Anything and everything may look difficult at times, but you should never lose confidence in yourself and feel that you have no

motivation and drive. As long as you are confident of your own abilities to achieve what you wish in life, I do not think that you will ever feel lonely.

We are constantly under the sway of our mind, performing and desiring according to our likes and dislikes, but we should realize that our likes and dislikes are not the final destination in the journey of life. Many times we have to go against the current of our likes and dislikes. This is known as the awakening of *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between what is just, proper and correct and what is wrong. If we have this power of discrimination, and if we are confident of our own abilities, then that tiny spark will eventually become a torch.

There is a song: “When the day is dark and dreary and the way is hard to find, don’t let your heart be weary, just keep this thought in mind: ‘It is better to light one little candle than to stumble in the dark; it is better to light one little candle, all you need is a tiny spark.’”

When we are confronted by darkness, we get nervous and tense, not realizing that the spark can be produced by many methods. We can use a lighter, match, flint, wood, anything, because everything which surrounds us in this universe has the power to assist us in our evolution. Every situation, every circumstance, no matter how difficult it may seem can help in the growth of the individual. What is essential is confidence in oneself.

Can yoga change our destiny?

It definitely can. First, we have to understand what our destiny is and what we mean by destiny. If we know ourselves, our mind, our personality, behaviour, actions and reactions; if we direct our actions and transform our negative tendencies into positive ones by having a clear mind, inner tranquillity and inner vitality; if we go beyond the normal frame of mind, emotions and behaviour and develop a better perspective, then we can definitely direct our own lives and thus create a certain change in our destiny.

There are two paths: one is the path of ignorance; the other is the path of knowledge. Usually human beings live in the area of ignorance. When I say ignorance I mean a lack of total knowledge. We may be sharp intellectually, we may be brilliant in our career, but we do not know our mind, we do not know our personality, we do not really know anything about ourselves. One can be a scientist, a great mathematician or a great philosopher, but when it comes to the human personality there is a lack of understanding. We do not know what we think, what we believe, what we experience or how to understand these experiences, and we do not know what to rationalize and what not to rationalize. There are so many things which we can and cannot understand.

When we walk the path of knowledge, our awareness and our consciousness bloom fully. We see everything clearly. We develop a different perspective altogether. It is like sitting in a room which is in total darkness and looking around, and then sitting in a room filled with bright light and looking around. There are two view-points here. When we are in the lit up room we can see every detail; when we are in the dark room we cannot see much. So definitely, through the growth of awareness, the development of consciousness, and the awakening of our inner faculties, we can reconstruct our life and personality.

Can siddhis be used as an aid to self-realization?

Yes. Although we define *siddhis* as telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, as having control over the situations of life, body and mind and so forth, these different abilities belong to the realm of the mind. They do not belong to the spiritual dimension. In the process of mental growth, or evolution, and mental purification, we come across these faculties. They are within us, but we do not know how to utilize them. Ninety-nine percent of people are not telepathic or clairvoyant, so we consider these abilities as being something very special, but once we are able to

train the mind in a certain way, these abilities emerge naturally. They represent a stage of mental and psychic achievement.

However, this state of mental and psychic achievement is not the ultimate aim in spiritual life, because it comes under a lower category and is quite different from spiritual achievement. There are four levels or strata: gross (physical and material), subtle (mental, emotional and intellectual), causal (which belongs to the level of the unconscious area of our personality and is the link between the spiritual and the mundane), and spiritual. In the spiritual dimension we have unlimited energy. In the physical dimension we have limited energy which is expressed in a limited way. Spiritual energy is expressed in a transcendental, unlimited way. Energy is expressed differently again in the subtle and causal dimensions.

Siddhis represent control over the subtle and causal aspects of life, which may be achieved through intense sadhana, self-purification, self-control, self-analysis and so on, but they are not considered to be transcendental; we still remain under the influence of the world, likes and dislikes, and the various vrittis of the mind. Patanjali has clearly defined this in his *Yoga Sutras* where he states that unless one is able to transcend the vrittis of the mind, one cannot go beyond the gravitational pull of the material world, or of the material mind and senses.

An aspirant or sadhaka, having achieved siddhis, should utilize them for gaining transcendental awareness and not apply them for the fulfilment of sensory pleasures or material gain, because then he will lose sight of the aim of life. And if you have achieved the highest state of life, then use those siddhis for the benefit of others. In many traditions people have performed miracles, not to satisfy their own ego, but to help others evolve. When they use psychic powers to teach others then it becomes a positive thing. Always remember this.

What is meant by facing the mind? Does the ashram set-up provide an environment conducive to accelerating this process?

This is an eternal question, because everybody who practises yoga or any kind of spiritual discipline will, at one time or another, be exposed to the theory of facing, controlling and following the mind. A lot of doubt has been created as to how this can be done. However, the basic philosophy behind it is that one has to realize the mind, not face, follow or confront it. If you try to understand yogic discipline from this angle, then the concept will become much clearer.

In order to get some help concerning this problem we have to turn to the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. He has defined the practices of yoga as “Techniques to control and stop the different faculties or modifications of mind.” He has also defined yoga as “A discipline which deals with the gross, subtle and causal manifestations, activities, and modifications of the mind and of life.” Keeping these two statements in mind, we can infer that the vrittis and the mind-stuff, the various aspects of the manifest mind, have to be understood objectively and not subjectively, with attachment or feeling.

Right now, the mind is in control of our actions, thoughts and behaviour. How far are we able to observe (I am not talking about control now) the actions that we perform, or our thoughts and the manifestation of our intellect? It is very difficult to answer this. If we say that we are observing the intellect, what are we actually observing, just the rational aspect or maybe the analytical or critical aspects? When we say that we are observing our thoughts, do we simply see the thoughts that come to the surface of the conscious mind, or the entire pattern of thoughts that are interlinked with each other?

The main emphasis in yoga is on observing the mental activities through the practices of pratyahara and dharana. The practice of *antar mouna*, the observation of the thoughts, is one example. Chidakasha dharana, yoga nidra, prana vidya, in fact ninety-nine percent of yoga practices belong

to this group of pratyahara and dharana. They are all geared towards finding out about the responses of the body, mind, emotions, intellect, indeed the entire physiological and psychological personality of man. It is the aim of these practices to first enable us to understand the activities of life, and then to discover the strengths and weaknesses that may be within us. These may have been uncovered through the circumstances and the environment around us so that we can discover the best way to act in any given situation. This type of realization will eventually lead us to know the full mind and not just scratch at its surface. Thus, our aim is to realize the mind and not to confront or face it.

This realization dawns with the natural acceptance of what we are and not what we aim to become. If I am weak then I am weak, but I should have the realization that I am weak. If I am negative or I have mental and psychological problems, I should be aware of them without trying to impose any external discipline or change in the existing pattern of mind. Generally, we do not follow this system. Under the influence of our intellect and other factors such as emotions, subjectivity and attachments, we become more aware of things that we like and dislike.

Everything in life falls into these two basic categories: I like this, so I accept it; I dislike that, so I reject it. Sometimes we fail to understand that what we like or dislike is according to the mental programming that has been taking place since the time of our birth. Every experience, event and situation is thus compartmentalized. Even when we go in during our yoga practice and come face to face with the different experiences, instead of clear, objective perception, we again begin to compartmentalize.

For example, if we meditate and have a pleasant vision of some god or guru, we feel, “Oh, this meditation is really helping me, centring and balancing me.” But if we become aware of the negativity within us, and of our fears, phobias and other demons, then automatically the feeling arises that maybe the practice is incorrect for us, and we do not want to

do it any more. In this way, even yoga practitioners tend to go according to their likes and dislikes, without realizing that both experiences are the expression of the inner personality and consciousness.

Within the framework of our consciousness, there is instinctive or animal awareness, a human awareness and a divine awareness. These are classified in yogic terminology as the three gunas; *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*, which are constantly changing day to day, week to week, all the time. Therefore, in order to overcome this handicap, it is suggested that rather than trying to intellectually analyze the mind, or rationalize the experiences, one should just observe and accept, knowing full well that they are coming up from inside. "I am the source of negativity as I am the source of positivity. I have to observe myself. I have to discover myself. I have to be a witness to the things happening inside myself." This type of realization is a must before we start any kind of practices which involve bringing up, or understanding the *vrittis* of the mind.

Regarding the ashram set-up: yes, there is a difference between the normal life one leads outside and life in the ashram. The ashram environment makes people very sensitive and more aware of their weaknesses as well as their strengths. The whole ashram environment is geared in this direction. It does not mean that we are looking for new ways to create trouble for people so that they come face to face with their minds. The lifestyle itself, the ashram structure and the relationships with others bring them up.

Outside, you have to control your ego. If you dislike someone, you dislike them during office hours, and if you dislike someone in your family you dislike them at home – once you go to the office there is a change. There is a system which breaks up the experiences of the mind, which does not allow you to dwell on the experience for long periods unless it has a significant influence on your personality.

However, in the ashram there is no means of escape. Here we live in the same building, we work in the same office, and we eat in the same kitchen. For twenty-four hours

we see the same person whom we like or dislike. If I have an argument with Swami So-and-So, I cannot avoid them while I am in the ashram. We will have to interact either on a departmental or personal basis. If it is personal, we will still have to communicate with each other, but there will be some kind of barrier all the time, and because we are not getting this break of eight hours in the office and four hours at home, the situation builds up more and more. Every time I see them I get tense. I wonder why they have come; is it to fight again for the same thing? Things like this do happen in the ashram.

Ashram life is conducive to enabling us to know what is going on in our minds. This happens if we stay here for an extended period of time, not for a week or two, not even for a couple of months, but only if we become part of the ashram family. It can act as a catalyst to make you either crazy or aware of the faulty areas in your life, and permit you to work through them and come out of that situation. Not many people seem to realize this even in the ashram. This process is a must for sannyasa training, but not for yoga training.

It has also been our experience that when people return home from the ashram and involve themselves in social life, they feel a change has taken place within, which often allows them to cope with the different life situations in a creative way. Of course, the aim of realizing the mind is to develop the creative aspect and to enable us to go beyond the limitations that we impose upon ourselves due to our own ignorance, fixed ideas and misconceptions.

Kindly explain in a scientific and spiritual manner the effect of the practices such as yoga nidra, meditation and mantra on the brain and mind.

This is a very complicated question because the six areas which we have to deal with are brain and mind, scientific and spiritual, relaxed frame of mind and meditative state of mind. I do not think it is possible to explain the transformation which takes place within the mind in scientific

language. To be very frank, even psychology is failing in this regard. Psychology cannot explain the reason for different types of behaviour; it cannot explain the concept of samskaras and karmas, and these are the basic things which comprise the totality of mind.

It is a known and understood fact that when we practise any kind of relaxation or meditative technique, we go through a process of gradual introversion. We try to attain an internalized consciousness from an extroverted state of mind. During this process of gradual withdrawal we go through the stages of pratyahara and dharana. Is it possible to relax immediately as soon as we lie down? No. Is it possible to meditate immediately? No. First we need to withdraw. The process of gradual withdrawal which implies that there is a kind of relaxation within the physiological system, the cerebral activity, and the mental activity, is the state of pratyahara.

When cerebral, physical and mental activity has stopped completely and the whole attention is focused, the body is at peace with itself; there is no disturbance, no distraction, no agitation, no feeling of uneasiness. When the right and left hemispheres of the brain are in harmony with each other, the activities of the brain waves are controlled through the state of relaxation and concentration and we are able to control the flow of thoughts, the mental dissipation. This is known as the state of dharana.

Pratyahara and dharana are the two states of yoga which we experience in every relaxation practice, whether it be yoga nidra or shavasana, siesta, a short cat-nap or even sleep. We also experience these same states when we are concentrating on reading a book, at work, if we have to meet a deadline or when we try to meditate or repeat our mantra. States of pratyahara and dharana represent a state of integration and harmony of mind, emotions, intellect and spirit. So, scientifically we can only monitor the physiological aspects; what types of brain waves are being created or activated in the brain, whether beta, alpha, delta or theta, but they are not representative of the actual mental states.

We can monitor the physiological conditions scientifically: the respirations, the heartbeat, the pulse, the blood pressure, the metabolic activity. However, by observing the physical body we cannot determine the exact state of our mind. We can only become aware of some link between body and mind. There is a link between body and mind, but we cannot become aware of the mind itself by observing or monitoring our body and mind. Through EEG or other biofeedback methods we can probably reach some kind of superficial conclusion: "This is what I am experiencing physically and this is what I am experiencing mentally." A general analysis can take place, but how far will that analysis be correct? We do not know, and in order to monitor the mental states, the activities of thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires and ambitions, perhaps new machines will have to be developed in the future.

What we observe now is the physiological reaction created by a mental activity. A desire comes up; certain nervous stimulations take place in the body and brain. We express an emotion; certain experiences take place in the nervous, digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular and cerebral systems. Fear comes up and we experience it in the body and brain. We feel the experience of peace in the body and brain. However, that is only the physiological reaction of a mental state. It is not the totality of the mental experience, because just as the mental experiences filter down through the body, these experiences also filter down in the same way, and this is known as the spiritual experience. When we become aware of the reactions in the dimension of the spirit, when we become aware of the spiritual reactions in the dimension of mind, this is spiritual awareness.

I would not even try to define or talk about the spiritual and scientific benefits of meditation. If however, you simply ask what happens scientifically or physiologically when you practise yoga nidra, ajapa japa, antar mouna, chidakasha dharana or kriya yoga then I can speak about that, but I cannot speak about such a vast subject, because we do not

have the basic understanding of the mind right now. Maybe in the course of many years, if we are able to gain an insight into mental experiences, we can discuss it.

The ancient cultures seemed to acknowledge life forms in other worlds. Is this true? How does the ancient knowledge compare with modern knowledge and yoga?

The Upanishads and the Vedas tell of life on other planets; and even the Puranas, the mythological stories, refer to this. If you look at the myths of the Hindus, there is mention of a flying chariot in the *Mahabharata*.

The ancients had a form of understanding which even the scientific minds do not possess today. In the *Rig Veda*, they talk about many different astrological conjunctions which happened fifty to sixty thousand years ago. Yet today, even with the help of science, we are barely able to make out what happened or how those conjunctions took place, in which zodiac signs, how far distant the stars were, and so on. The nearest star is so many billion miles and light-years away, and this has also been mentioned in the Vedas. We do not know how this information was obtained.

The ancient Sumerians had knowledge of other worlds. The Babylonians also had knowledge of other forms of life on the worlds which they had visited, just as it is mentioned in the Indian pantheon. In the Egyptian culture, there is a great deal of evidence concerning life on other planets, and if you look at the South American cultures of the Aztecs, Mayans and Incas, you will find similar stories. The ancient histories of the world, their scriptures, beliefs and ideas, are based on a higher form of knowledge than we possess today.

We are critical of extra-terrestrial references today because we are unable to understand them. It is like the story of the seven blind men and the elephant, each taking hold of a different part of the animal and thinking it is the whole elephant. A little knowledge can reveal nothing, if there is not some vision or understanding along with it. Even with science, we fail to look at reality in its totality; even with

all our technological advances and qualifications, we are not able to grasp even the first one percent of the totality. However, the ancients possessed this knowledge.

Today we deal with figures and facts; we like to see definite evidence. We want to see it with our own eyes, and that is not really possible in many cases. There are certain aspects of reality which we can experience with our normal day-to-day consciousness, but there are other areas of reality which we cannot experience with our normal consciousness.

There was a scientist who said to a priest, "You talk about God. Why don't you show me where God is?" The priest very simply replied, "Well, you talk about the atom. Why don't you show me where the atom is?" The scientist said, "We have instruments by which you can see the atom." The priest replied, "And we have methods by which you can experience God."

Take telepathy for example. Can you explain how telepathy works? Scientists are doing research on it. They know that telepathy takes place between two people, but how does it take place? Nobody knows. It is like the story of the sun and the light, the cause and the effect; we cannot see the process. Science is incomplete, because it has only talked about cause and effect.

Many religions, and philosophies like tantra and yoga, have tried to shed some light in the direction of understanding the process involved. They recommend a particular meditation or practice. We do it. We control our mind, we become aware, we observe, we create this and destroy that. This is a process; it is not cause and effect. If we can sincerely implement these practices into our life, we can develop the same type of intuitive perception that Sanjaya had when he was telling of the Great War at Kurukshetra, without actually being there. It is possible that suddenly, out of the blue, the third eye will open up.

We make a big blunder, however, when we try to understand everything through the intellect. How far can we

go with our intellect? It is a very incomplete tool. Through the intellect alone we cannot understand the many unseen influences that are taking place around us. We do not know how to control them, but we think about them. We cannot even control our emotional outbursts. After we get angry, we feel sorry, we feel guilty. When we are not able to understand even these gross manifestations of our personality through rationalization, through the intellect, this incomplete tool, how can we understand the super-normal?

In my opinion, it is better to first know the cause and the effect. The seed is the cause, the tree is the effect. Let us examine the process of its growth and try to understand it: you water it, you put compost on it, and slowly the tree grows. When you take care of it, it blooms; when you do not care for it, it simply withers and dies. In order to grow a tree, a process of caring is involved. A certain amount of water has to be given, and air has to enter the roots; light is also necessary. When you plant a seed, you have to leave it in the earth; you cannot take it out every day to see how much it has grown. It will never flourish like that. So we should have the basic understanding of cause and effect, and try to see the process of how the effect has evolved from the cause. How did this giant tree come up from a tiny seed? What type of care and preparation went into it? This is the first step in understanding the basic principles of the process of its growth.

Therefore, it is important to know that Brahman is there, the cause, and that the world is there, the effect, and by means of yoga, we can find out the process.

How necessary is a relationship with the guru in spiritual life?

There is a time in spiritual life when the relationship with the guru becomes very important. How far we are able to carry on this relationship depends on our own evolution. Many people say that the guru is within. No doubt, the guru is within, but for a light to work the switch has to be turned on. A human being is just a connection with a switch. It has the

bulb and the wires, but in order for the light to shine in the bulb, maybe zero watt, maybe one thousand watts, somebody has to press the switch. We press it ourselves. Somebody has to maintain the wires in proper order, removing the carbon from them so that there is no short circuit, and so that the energy can flow naturally and spontaneously without making sparks fly. Learning how to maintain the wires in proper order happens through the guru, utilizing the system of yoga. Once the wires have been checked and found to be in perfect order, intact, then the guru points to the switch and says, “Flip that down” and you do it.

However, it is difficult to say where the switch is located, mainly for the reason that we all have different personalities. For an intellectual personality the switch may be in the intellect, in the mind. For the devotional personality, the switch may be in the heart. For the psychic personality, the switch may be deep down in the unconscious realm. For the dynamic personality, the switch may be in the day-to-day expressions of life. This is where the role of the guru comes in and he tells us, “Your switch is there. You have to flip it down.”

How can we relax mental tensions so that we can enjoy life better?

Yoga nidra is a technique of relaxation which gradually leads the consciousness from external to internal experiences, while inducing a state of deep physiological and psychological relaxation. This in turn enhances our power of action, performance, efficiency and creativity. There are many books and tapes on this subject which give theoretical, practical and scientific guidance.

The same applies to bhramari pranayama. It intensifies awareness, concentrates the mind, and removes mental and emotional agitation.

The practice is very simple. With the index fingers you plug the ears so that the external sounds are minimized. Then take a deep breath in, and when you breathe out, hum

like a bee, “Mmmmmmm . . .” for as long as the breath can continue. While you are humming, become aware of the vibration inside the centre of head and try to pinpoint the exact location from where that vibration is emanating. Do this seven to ten times every day. You will definitely notice a change.

What is the essential or vital link between the individual and universal soul, given that the individual soul is not self-sufficient?

The link between the individual soul and the universal soul is the identity of ‘I’ which people call ‘ego’, and most schools of thought will agree that once the ego is dissolved, there is no distinction between individual consciousness and super-consciousness.

The ego is like a shell; it is like a container where the spirit or the energy is experienced in a different form, as a different entity. One example to explain this is that of sitting in a room. The wind outside may be blowing at one hundred miles per hour, but inside do we feel the wind blowing at this speed? No. Air exists both outside and inside, however because of the walls the movement of wind is not experienced inside the room at the speed of one hundred miles per hour.

In the same way, the super-consciousness, or the universal soul, is experienced in the form of the individual soul when we are confined by our ego. The ego is like the room, and it is in our ego that we find shelter, satisfaction, enjoyment, happiness and contentment. In English it is only one word – ‘ego’, but in Sanskrit there are two words defining this ego principle. One is *ahamkara*: *aham* plus *akara*. *Akara* means form or identity; *aham* is the ‘I’ principle. Every one of us has this identity of ego.

If I were to answer this question in Hindi I would say that the best way to experience the universal soul is to remove the *akara*, the shape of ego, and let only an awareness of ego remain – *aham*. That *aham* or ego is then called super-ego.

Yoga says that we do not really try to dissolve our ego through sadhana. As long as we have the body, as long as we have the present mind, intellect and consciousness, we cannot dissolve our ego completely. We would need to live without the body, without the mind, without the consciousness in order to completely dissolve the ego in our present state. The moment there is any kind of manifestation, creation, shape, form or attribute, ego is bound to be there, because that constitutes the identity of an object. A stone also has an ego. We rationalize ego through the intellect, but ego is the identity of manifest spirit.

Every form of creation contains the aspect of energy and consciousness, and where these two exist there is bound to be ego. We only try to remove or dissolve the identity. We stay in the room because we do not know how to live beyond the room at present. We do not know how to live beyond the body. We do not know how to survive without the mind. We do not know how to survive without the intellect and the senses. So, while living in confined quarters we simply break down the walls to have the experience of openness – no barriers. Once the walls are broken the identity is dissolved and we experience super-consciousness or universal soul. That is the yogic concept. Therefore, ego is considered to be the link between the experience of individual soul and universal soul.

Can yoga help us to control our emotions?

Yes, yoga can help you to remain in full control of your emotions, but of course this requires intense training, because emotional energy is a very raw energy. It is like a bomb. You just explode, and there is no real awareness of that explosion. At the time of an emotional explosion there is no rationality. You cannot think what is right, you cannot think what is wrong, where you are or what is happening. Afterwards you can think about it and feel guilty, maybe you became angry at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and maybe you should not have done it. The fault was entirely

yours. The point is that emotion is a raw form of energy, whereas rationality is a very refined form of energy. You can rationalize anything, reach right conclusions, make decisions and have lucid thoughts, if you have achieved that clear state of mind.

In order to channelize this raw emotion, the best practice is antar mouna. Side by side you should practise some asanas which will help relax the nervous system so that you are not easily agitated, and there is better coordination between the body, brain and mind. Of course, there are many yoga teachers who prescribe different asanas to overcome emotional problems, but the main aspect is that of awareness. How can you remain aware that you are fearful, trembling and sweating due to fear and that you cannot think properly due to intense fear? How can you be aware that you are angry, depressed, or nervous for some reason? How can you become aware of these changes, and at the same time maintain a proper state of mind to overcome these conflicting states?

Antar mouna will provide a base for the development of awareness of thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviour, and enable you to know where they are coming from. What is the source of my anxiety or my depression? What is it that I like in my wife, and that I do not like in some other person? Then, with *viveka*, or discrimination, you will be able to decipher why a certain situation affects you emotionally more than other situations. This process of knowing why you are being affected, what the cause is within you that is making you suffer, will enable you to control your emotions completely.

In yoga, controlled emotions are not suppressed emotions. They are let out like water being slowly released from a dam. You open one of the gates and allow some water to flow out. Then you close the gate, so there is no build-up of emotions, and the emotional outlet is controlled. If you become angry, you know that you are angry and you are able to judge your similar previous mental states and realize the

negative reactions that will ensue due to this anger, and what the final outcome of it will be. Thus, controlled emotion is what you attain through yoga, rather than an unknown outburst of emotions or suppressed emotions.

As a yoga teacher, how can I develop creativity in my daily life?

The answer is very simple. This question can be answered in one word: observe. As a yoga teacher you should have well-developed awareness. You should observe yourself and always try to improve whatever you do. Try to be perfect. Try to do everything better each time. Develop *icchashakti*, the positive aspect of desire; *kriyashakti*, the energy of action; *sankalpashakti*, the energy of determination; and *vicharashakti*, the energy of positive thinking. All the positive, creative qualities of life have to be increasingly developed.

This does not mean that you negate everything that you consider bad. You simply begin to observe yourself. There is no negation of any type. If you want to improve yourself and become creative, happy, satisfied and successful, take everything in life as a form of sadhana. We just have to look at Sri Swamiji to see this philosophy in practice. He has taken every activity, every situation, every problem and joy of life as a form of sadhana. Therefore, if he is surrounded by difficult people or hard times he is totally at peace with everybody, and if he is surrounded by good people and good times, still he is at peace with everything and every situation, because every single moment of his life is a moment of sadhana. His entire life is a process of sadhana.

For the rest of us, living like this is probably the hardest thing we could do, but we can always start with observation. We should be constantly aware of how we feel, how we react, how we behave, how we think, and consider how we can improve our thinking, behaviour, feelings and projections, and how we can understand ourselves better.

Is there any way to help Indian women attain their rights in the home? How can we make men realize that women are human beings and that they should treat them accordingly?

Before such questions can be discussed, we have to understand that in Indian society, certain ideas have taken very deep roots and no matter how hard people try, those original concepts will be very difficult to eradicate unless there is some kind of drastic change.

Long ago, there was equality among males and females in India. Women were placed in the same category as men. They had the same facilities, the same rights, duties and obligations, but in the course of, say, three thousand years, many changes took place in society that somehow imposed the idea of inferiority on females. Not only that, it also infused an idea of inferiority and superiority between the males as well, in the form of the caste system – brahmins are superior to vaishyas, kshatriyas are superior to shudras, that kind of feeling. Therefore, the change did not remain confined to females only but affected the whole of society. In fact, the division was felt more amongst males than females. To be very frank, males are a more repressed community than females in India.

The role of women in India has been mainly that of 'home minister' or 'caretaker'. They have had the restriction of not being able to come out of their houses, of not coming out of *purdah*, the wearing of the veil, and of not having been given the same opportunity as males in terms of jobs, expression, skills and so forth. Even their education was curtailed for quite a long time. It is only recently that people have become more concerned about the restrictions such as female education.

Males have had to face a lot of difficulties of a different kind. They have faced ex-communication in India and they were assigned specific jobs. In India a carpenter would never conceive of adopting another kind of job. A cobbler could never conceive of becoming a carpenter; a barber could never become a businessman. It was a very orthodox society; there

was a fixed pattern of living. Those who tried to rebel against this kind of group were excommunicated. Indian literature is full of such instances. Indian men are, in fact, a more repressed lot than females, and therefore the question is incorrect.

However, gradually the awareness is growing that both males and females have an IQ, and both must express themselves, their skills and their nature, without any inhibition, without any restriction. Of course, that trend has started in big cities, where people are more influenced by the glamour of western civilization and the consumer society. In places that are as yet untouched by the influence of the consumer society, people are still struggling. Maybe after a few generations such restrictions will disappear, but in the meantime, men still have an uphill task to get rid of the caste system and to find equality. This is the Indian situation.

If we are warned of a future accident by an astrologer, can we prevent it from happening, can we change our destiny?

There is a true story about a man in California. He used to be afraid that California would go underwater due to an earthquake caused by the San Andreas Fault. He used to have nightmares of his house collapsing, his family and himself getting buried under the rubble of the house and of the whole state sinking under water. He used to be terrified of living and working in California. Eventually somebody said to him, "Instead of living in constant fear, why don't you leave the state and go and settle in some other part of the United States?" So he left California and settled in the state of Montana. There was an earthquake there. His house collapsed and he died. So, how far can you avoid your destiny? You cannot.

An event occurred two months ago in Bariarpur, only fourteen kilometres from Munger. Two people were travelling on a motorcycle. They came to a railway crossing and stopped. A vulture flew overhead, carrying a snake. The snake fell from its claws on top of one of the men, bit him

and started slithering away. The vulture swooped again, picked up the snake and flew off. The man died. What would you call that, death from heaven? How could anybody have imagined that that snake was going to fall from the sky, and the man was going to die of a snake bite?

Destiny as such cannot be changed, and in order to understand destiny one has to understand the role of karma. Sri Swamiji used to give the following example concerning karma. You have a revolver in your hand. You can put it back, throw it away, or shoot. You are in control, but once you pull the trigger and the bullet is released there is no way you can bring that bullet back.

There are two kinds of destiny: one over which you have control, man-made destiny, and the other where the trigger has been pulled and you cannot hide from it. The destiny of the body is to grow old, to decay and to die. Can we stop the process of growing old? The trigger was pulled the moment we took birth, the bullet is on its way and it will hit the bullseye the moment we die. That kind of destiny has already started and we do not have the ability to stop it.

However, there are other forms of destiny or karma which we can change, which we can create. If I want to, I can become anything: a businessman, a householder, a sweeper on the road, a cobbler or a tycoon. In that regard, I make my own destiny, and if I have the awareness that I can always become something else, then I will continue to make my own destiny. This is known as *purushartha karma*. The *Bhagavad Gita* uses the terms *sanchit karma* and *prarabdha karma*. *Sanchit karma* is what I make. *Prarabdha karma* is what God makes. One has to have that kind of understanding before deciding whether destiny can be changed or not.

Could you talk about the different types of yoga: bhakti yoga, kriya yoga, hatha yoga, etc., and the different types of people for whom they are suited?

First of all, yoga is a combination of various practices which lead to some kind of inner awareness in relation to our body,

our mind, our life, and what we ultimately wish to achieve. Yogis have defined this attainment as union which represents a harmonious state of personality, a balance between the external and internal actions and experiences, and also a state of perfection, as we grow in mind, behaviour, emotions and spirit. These are the main yogic concepts in a nutshell.

It is easy for us to identify initially with the body. The body can elevate us to great heights of experience and it can also give us the experience of pain and suffering, illness, disease and stress. If there is a pain in any part of the body we are aware of it and we try to remove that pain. The mind is automatically attracted towards the experience of objects which provide satisfaction, pleasure, enjoyment and happiness.

The body represents matter. Our life is dominated by matter. You are also matter, are you not? This house is matter. The things which I perceive outside and which influence me are a part of matter. So it is a question of matter supporting matter. Once the awareness of matter, which comprises the body, other people, our relationship with each other, our interactions with the environment, with society and the world, has been developed up to a certain point, then that perception further develops into the subtle experience of the mind-field.

Things outside are constantly affecting, altering and influencing our mind; the mental, intellectual and emotional experiences which undergo changes according to different environments and situations. After the subtle awareness of mind and matter has developed, a third awareness is generated which is termed 'spiritual awareness'. The process leading us through this awakening and awareness of body, mind and spirit is known as raja yoga.

In raja yoga, four aspects of the human condition are covered. Asana and pranayama are physical in nature, belonging to the experience of matter. The practices of pratyahara and dharana give us the experience of our mind-field and what the limits, functions and modifications of the mind are. The practices of dhyana and samadhi give us

the experience of our spiritual or inner nature. Yama and niyama, which are the first two stages of raja yoga, allow us to gain a greater comprehension of our interaction with the external environment, and with others. Raja yoga is a practice which gradually helps us to attain this perception of our physical, mental and spiritual interaction, in other words – communication.

Yoga says that the body which we experience is a composition of five different bodies or koshas: *annamaya kosha*, the body of matter; *pranamaya kosha*, the body of energy; *manomaya kosha*, the body of mind; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the body of higher intelligence; and *anandamaya kosha*, the body of spirit. These five bodies together give us the experience of life. The body is comprised of these five different experiences, so the awakening of energy has to take place in five altered states of consciousness. With one state of consciousness we experience matter with another energy, with another mind, with another higher intelligence, and with yet a different energy we experience spirit. In order to become aware in each of the altered states we have to utilize a specific practice or technique, and due to this, the different yogas slowly evolved.

Jnana yoga is the yoga of questioning, analyzing and understanding. It is the ‘Yoga of Wisdom’, as they call it in general terms. In this yoga, through a meditative process in which we enquire within ourselves as to the real nature of our being, we awaken the experience of vijnanamaya kosha.

Through the practice of bhakti yoga, which is generally known as ‘the yoga of devotion’, we awaken and experience our manomaya and pranamaya koshas. These are aspects which can be channelled, controlled, understood and experienced through the energy of emotional expression.

With kriya yoga we can understand and awaken the faculties of the psyche, the deeper mind which is beyond the range of human perception at present, the so-called ‘sixth sense’, intuition, the ability to control the elements. Here we act from centres within our personality which control the

activity of the pranas, the evolution of consciousness, and the manifestation and expression of the external mind.

In the practice of karma yoga purification of our psyche takes place. This is probably the most misunderstood branch. Karma yoga is usually identified with hard work or selfless services but it is not that. It is the cleansing of the karma which comes about through this yoga. A yogi, meaning a practitioner of yoga, can practise karma yoga through the body, speech, behaviour and attitudes, with one aim, one goal: self-purification. This is clearly stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

There are many minor aspects of the yogas which we have not yet fully understood and which need a lot of pondering and analyzing. Then eventually, they should be incorporated into our lives.

What is the difference between personality and real nature?

Our real nature is the essence of our being, and that essence can only be experienced. What is the personality of a rose? The shape, the petals or the smell. But what is the real essence of the rose? Personality and real nature merge into each other, and we can only discover our true essence when we go within ourselves. Then, if there is awareness, it will be very easy for us to differentiate between our personality and our real nature.

Right now, I am experiencing myself in a certain way. My mind is working in a particular direction. I think in a particular way, I behave and act in a particular way, whether it is within me or with other people. Every one of us does the same. Is what we feel ourselves to be actually our real nature, or not?

According to the concept of yoga, tantra, Vedanta or Samkhya, the aim of human life is transcendence, transcending this present level of being, keeping in view what we wish to become, reaching that point and transcending that also. In social terms this constant movement from point A to point B, to point C, to point D is evolution, and in individual terms it is transcendence of mind, or of the state of being.

When we have eventually reached the last point of our present life, when we have realized our ego, when we have realized our mind-field, then the final experience of the continuity of consciousness or of the spirit will be the realization of our real nature. Personality, on the other hand, is what we express and utilize to come to that point.

After practising trataka there was a big improvement in my eyesight the first year, but then after some time I had to start wearing even thicker glasses than before. Why was this?

Many things can go wrong if you do not know the actual method and process of practising a yoga technique. If you practise trataka with the candle flame too close to the eyes, or too far away, then that will affect the eye muscles. The time of the day you practise will also influence the result.

For health benefits, trataka should be practised in the evening during the period of twilight, and while practising there should be no visual disturbances. If you are practicing trataka with a candle there should not be any draught in the room. The flame should be steady.

There are other yoga techniques to improve the eyesight which should be practised along with trataka: eye exercises, kunjal, neti, pranayama and asana to remove tension from the eye muscles. I would recommend that you first get your practice checked and learn the proper way of performing trataka.

What is Sufism? How does it compare to yoga?

The Sufis do not consider themselves to be a religious group. The whole concept of Sufism is to become one with Nature and the universe. They develop this through certain spontaneous physiological movements. The Sufi dances in order to open up the creative aspects of consciousness.

According to the Sufis the whole universe is in constant motion, and all the planets, stars and celestial bodies move in a particular rhythm, in coordination with each other. In order to experience that movement they utilize a very special dance in which they try to become one with the movement of

the celestial bodies, with the vibration of the universe. Their philosophy is very close to yogic philosophy, or indeed with any of the leading systems of the world, because they go by the basic principle that man should attune himself with the rhythm of Nature.

In the science of mantra they say the same thing; that the cause of creation is sound. The ancient Indian scriptures talk about *hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic egg, which split open, bringing creation into being. Scientists today have also used that same principle to explain the Big Bang theory. First there was a concentrated energy; then it exploded. As in mantra yoga, the Sufis believe that where there is movement there is vibration, and where there is vibration there is sound, whether audible or inaudible. It is a three-fold concept.

There are Sufi meditations in which you become one with the movement of the various manifestations of *Prakriti*, or Nature. One form of Sufi meditation is to imagine yourself as a tree. You try to experience the movement, the life energy, the stability, the solidity, the limbs and leaves of the tree. You imagine that you are the trunk; perfectly still and firm. You have so many layers of skin in concentric circles; they all begin with a point or *bindu*, and from that point those circles extend giving shape to the tree. You experience yourself as being the branches of the tree; some long, some short, some thick, some thin, some crooked, some straight. You imagine that you are the leaves swaying in the wind, and so forth.

Briefly, Sufism is becoming aware of the movement existing in each and every thing, and if we think about it from the yogic point of view it is one of the highest ways of understanding Purusha and Prakriti, not through rationalization, but by becoming aware of the principle of motion in everything. The basis of their philosophy is known as *anahak* – I am that.

Was Sufism an offshoot of Islam?

No, it existed before Islam. The whole concept of Sufism was developed in ancient Persia by recluses similar to the sannyasins of ancient India. These sannyasins were actually

rejects from the so-called 'human society' because they would not conform to the stereotyped belief or pattern of living. They were looked upon as being either mad or intoxicated.

Did they not claim that they were God and therefore society did not accept them?

We all have the spark of divinity within us.

How are their teachings different from those of swamis or yogis?

Their teaching is in the form of parables and poems which convey the deeper knowledge, the code of conduct, or *yama*, and the disciplines, *niyama*. If we look closely at this teaching we will see that it correlates with most other philosophies, except that it does not talk about morality or puritanism, as all other philosophies do in one way or another. They impart it in story form and allow the message to sink in, so that one begins to follow the disciplines and spontaneously adopts a different way of living from within one's own self. It is therefore not an enforced doctrine, but a very natural way of life. Mullahs are Sufi saints; you must have come across many stories about Mullah Nasruddin.

Is it true that they sleep in peculiar positions, and meditate facing east?

In meditation it is more acceptable that you face east because of the rotation of the earth and the rising of the sun. There is a greater emission of solar rays or energy from the east, so according to yogic theory, when we face east we absorb the energy through the forehead and release energy from the back. While facing east at the time of meditation, it is easier for the energy to maintain its continuous flow. That is the natural pole of the body-reception and repulsion.

What is the difference between prana and kundalini?

This question is like asking the difference between body, arms, legs and head. Arms, legs, and head are part of

the body, but the body is a composite of all these. It is a combination of eyes, nose, ears, mouth, head, back, spine, arms, fingers and legs. Kundalini can be similarly described. It is an experience of the combination of different manifest and unmanifest energies.

According to yogic philosophy the pranas that control the body are divided into two groups. One is vital energy, and the other is mental energy. Vital energy has again been subdivided into five groups, known as the *vayus* or winds – prana, apana, samana, udana, and vyana. These five winds are interconnected with the five elements which manifest from mooladhara to vishuddhi chakra.

In kundalini yoga, the awakening of the pranas takes place first. We gain knowledge of the pranas and control over their flow. After the pranas have been awakened through practices such as pranayama, prana vidya and other techniques of kundalini yoga and tantra, we begin to stimulate and awaken the psychic centres.

The first stage in the awakening of the psychic centres is known as *tattwa shuddhi*, purification of the elements. After that comes *chakra shuddhi*, purification of the chakras. Next is *chakra dhyana*, awakening of the chakras. When all the chakras have been awakened, there is no blockage of energy. We are able to experience the different states of mind, and there is no division in different experiences of mind. This state is known as the kundalini state, where the different manifestations of energy have become one. The concept of duality, of many different experiences, no longer remains. Only one awareness is there, and according to tradition, that is the meaning of kundalini. Of course, people can interpret it in many different ways and they may be correct. Kundalini is definitely a very misunderstood and, at the same time, a much desired experience. Everybody wants to awaken their kundalini.

When we begin our practice with the purpose of awakening kundalini we might feel certain sensations in the region of the chakras, which we may consider to be

the kundalini manifestation. Shaking or shivering of the body, body spasm, currents flowing in the body and static electricity within the body may be experienced. We may see different flashes of colour and light. But this is not the actual kundalini awakening.

All the sensations which one may experience in the body or mind represent a state of transformation taking place within and which is motivated, directed and controlled by the pranas, the tattwas, the elements, and the awakening of the chakras. Only when both the positive and negative energies, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems, are in balance and harmony with each other does the kundalini energy awaken, and then it will go through the states of the three gunas: tamas, rajas and sattwa.

These three states are represented in the form of the Shivalinga. If you refer to any traditional description or drawing of the chakras, you will see a black Shivalinga in mooladhara and swadhisthana. This black Shivalinga represents the tamasic or gross state of life, which we call the *sthula* experience. Manipura, anahata and vishuddhi contain within them the *dhumralinga*, the smokey-grey Shivalinga. They represent the rajasic state. Ajna and sahasrara contain the *jyotirlinga*, the linga of light, which is bright and colourless. They represent the sattwic state of mind.

With the awakening of kundalini, the three states: gross, subtle and causal or tamasic, rajasic and sattwic, are controlled. This transformation of the total consciousness is the awakening of kundalini, and not the awakening of prana.

Within us there are two aspects. One is of energy and the other is of consciousness. Energy and consciousness, the two extremes of human experience and expression, become one when kundalini eventually reaches its destination in sahasrara. When we are working with prana, the tattwas and the chakras, we are simply trying to transform the prana. By transforming, altering and changing the pranic flow, sometimes a natural, spontaneous change also occurs in the consciousness. Kundalini, however, is a process of

consciousness and not of energy. That is the difference between prana and kundalini.

Can yoga nidra change the quality of dreams? Does more material from the subconscious and unconscious start coming to the surface as a result of this practice?

When we practise yoga nidra the technique of visualization creates various sensations in the body. Imagining certain feelings within the body can trigger off various memory centres and bring up deep-rooted memories, experiences and events from our subconscious and unconscious mind. Therefore, one of the achievements of yoga nidra is conscious dreaming.

We may not call it conscious dreaming, we may call it controlled perception of mind, or willed perception of mind, so that even if we are not dreaming but are fast asleep there will be an awareness that we are sleeping. If we dream, there will be an awareness that we are dreaming. If we are lost in some kind of fantasy, there will be awareness that we are fantasizing.

The aspect of awareness develops in yoga nidra, and it is through this aspect that, eventually, you will be able to control various memories, dreams and deep-rooted subconscious and unconscious impressions.

When two people are married and do not get along with each other, is it anti-spiritual for them to divorce?

I remember somebody in India asking Sri Swamiji why there are these problems between husband and wife that lead to the breakup of the marriage and eventually divorce. He gave a very straight answer. He said, "They do not share the same goal. If both of them shared the same goal and aim in life, then such problems would not occur."

This question has to be answered differently according to western society, because it is a different social system altogether.

When we fall in love with somebody, it is because we like that person emotionally and feel that he or she can satisfy

our need, whatever that may be. If my mother says to me, “No, that person is not nice” I will feel a rebellion inside: “How can she say that? She does not know that person!” I am still judging the prospective partner with an emotional eyeglass; I make no effort to know the aim of her life. I might have one aim; she might have a different one. Maybe five years later we will go our different ways in order to fulfil our separate aims and ambitions.

If two people share the same aim in life, then the relationship can be a very fulfilling, enriching and spiritual one, and the question of divorce simply does not arise.

Another thing that happens in divorce is that we decide, “Okay, it is going to happen.” Then we begin to feel insecure financially, socially and personally, “What am I going to do? I’ll have to find some place to stay, get a job and support the family.” Then we are caught up in that mental conflict. It is at this point that we can say divorce is anti-spiritual, because we lose our internal balance.

However, if the person who is having a divorce simply accepts it, and that situation does not create tension and conflict, and they are able to maintain their inner serenity and balance, then it would not be considered anti-spiritual. If you have some kind of spiritual background, then this should not affect you as an individual at all. Things like this happen in life and they will continue to happen. How much can one fight against them or try to avoid them?

Who were the original sages or gurus that visualized the chakra symbols? Have different symbols manifested from the chakras since?

According to mythology, Shiva was the first exponent of yoga and tantra many thousands of years ago. In his exposition of tantra he has described the chakras. According to historians, when the Aryan migration was taking place in the Indian sub-continent, there lived a tribe who were known as the Dravidians. Their headquarters were in the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

Tantra was the main culture and practice of the Dravidians. In today's language we may even call it the religion of the Dravidian tribe. In that culture, the Dravidians considered Shiva as their main figurehead, the main master and teacher of the tantric system.

The Dravidians regarded Shiva as a living person, not as a mythological one, who actually wandered through the sub-continent covered with ashes, followed by dogs, carrying a trident and living in graveyards or desolate places. If their beliefs are true, if Shiva was indeed a living person, then it would have been many thousands of years ago that he described the chakras.

These Dravidian people have maintained the same concept and symbology of the chakras as described by Shiva. There has been practically no alteration, and later on, when they developed the faculty to draw the chakras, to draw yantras on leaves or stone utilizing various colours, they gave different colours to the petals or the actual design of the chakra. However, even the colours and designs were described much earlier.

How can I understand the concept of 'gods'? I do not believe that such forms exist, or even that there is a God 'up there' somewhere.

We should not think of 'gods' as concepts, rather, we should think of them in terms of qualities, because a 'god' is a manifestation of a quality. People who believe in an ishta devata, be it Shiva, Rama, Christ, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Kali or Durga, are looking for a particular quality which that image or figure represents. In tantra, the deva is the concept of a quality while the Shakti is the manifest form of that quality.

There is also another aspect of Shakti. The counterpart of devi is *danavi*, the terrorising forms of devi, such as Rakini, Dakini, Shakini or Kakini, which instil fear, nervousness, heartbreak, heart failure and so on.

A person who is more inclined towards a particular concept worships that particular aspect of Devi. Robbers

usually worship Kali because of her terrorizing aspect, all the money-minded people worship Lakshmi, the majority of housewives worship Durga, body-conscious young men worship Hanuman, students generally worship Ganesha and Saraswati while swamis tend to worship Shiva. We look for certain qualities in the devas, or manifestations of Shiva and Shakti, with which to identify.

If we look at them, not from the view-point of faith or because they live 'up there', but as qualities that are manifested in every being from time to time, and if we can begin to understand these qualities, then we can come closer to understanding the process of creation, maya, karma and God.

One concept, for example, is of Devi standing on Shiva. This is the ultimate aim of tantra, where Shakti is above Shiva. In this example, Shakti is the dynamic force and Shiva is the passive form. He surrenders. He lies down and Shakti comes and stands on top of him. If you are familiar with the myth, you will know that after Shakti had destroyed all the demons, she ran amock and the gods could not please or stop her, so they came to Shiva. Shiva tried to stop her, but he too failed, so in the end he said, "Okay, I surrender, instead of destroying creation, you can destroy me", and he lay down. After Shiva surrendered, the Devi was pacified.

Shiva here represents Mahakala. This is the concept of time and space, where the infinite becomes finite. *Kala* is time, *maha* is great. The concept of expanding both time and space are here. After all the instincts and seed-forms are destroyed in an individual, there remains nothing of his identity or ego. Then that dynamic energy or force which has brought about this change finally subdues and contracts time and space, thus making the manifest unmanifest, the finite infinite.

Can you discuss the symbol of the swastika?

The swastika is considered to be an auspicious sign in India. The symbols which we find today in the Indian culture, and which are considered to be auspicious, are also found

in the various cultures of South America, especially in the Indian tribes of the Mayas, Chibchas, Incas and Aztecs, in Scandinavian countries, Egypt and Greece. Wherever ancient cultures have flourished we find certain signs. They are not predominantly Indian, Greek or Egyptian, because symbols represent a state of mental and psychic experience, and despite the ideological and political differences between cultures and countries, the experiences of human consciousness are the same.

There are some basic qualities of consciousness which each and everyone shares, like love. We cannot say that love is predominantly Indian or American. It is a universal feeling, just like hatred, harmony or anger. Upon reaching a certain stage of evolution the consciousness begins to experience various symbols which are considered to be milestones in spiritual life, or in the awakening of the dormant faculties of mind. These symbols are later on translated according to our belief, culture, and tradition and become ideological and subjective experiences.

We should know that human experiences at any given stage of life are the same. Even if you are Chinese, once your consciousness rises you will have an experience of this symbol. How you interpret that is dependent on your intellectual process, but the structure and the basic experience is universal.

There are many yoga practices. How does one choose an appropriate practice? Should the student ask the guru for sadhana or guidance?

Yes. There are two ways of choosing a yoga practice. If you are aware of the requirements of the body and mind, then you can choose a suitable practice for yourself. The need of the body may change from day to day or from week to week and it is possible for the sadhana to change from day to day or from week to week also.

However, here we are dealing with a very superficial aspect of yoga. If you want to involve yourself in some

specific mental or spiritual area, then for that you do need the assistance of the guru in order to select the right asana for the awakening of particular chakras. You need to select the proper pranayama for cerebral benefits, to relax the beta and alpha, and stimulate the theta and delta brain waves. You will also need a proper practice of meditation which may not necessarily be according to your liking, but which is required for your further development. Therefore, for mental or spiritual benefits and the selection of yoga practices, the assistance of a guru is necessary, unless you are very aware of the mind and of your psychological and psychic needs.

However, if it is just superficial practice that you wish to do, “I have half an hour and I want to do some yoga. Okay, what does my body require today? A bit stiff, here, some pain there, feeling tense up top, and the neck is a bit tense” All right, then do the necessary practices for relieving the stiffness, tension headache and neck pain. Next day, change your program. This you can choose yourself.

How can I live like a yogi?

If you want to live like a good yogi, the best way is to follow your common sense, because a yogi utilizes his common sense more than following a set pattern of thought and action. It is *viveka*, discrimination, which is important: what is right, what is not right, what should be done now, what should not be done immediately but can be done later on. Viveka will awaken once you start following your common sense. That type of awareness should be developed within you, rather than saying, “Okay, I will remember my guru, I will do my yoga practices, I will sit for meditation, I will do my service”, and you must set out a timetable for yourself.

In yoga, we first try to develop two qualities of mind: *viveka* and *vairagya*. *Viveka* means discrimination or right knowledge; *vairagya* means detachment, or more than detachment, an objective awareness. You are observing, you have that objective awareness towards everything, including your personal feelings, life, family, surroundings, disciples,

community, work and everything. Once you have developed these two qualities, your mind goes through a process of purification.

The other principles of yoga spoken about by Sage Patanjali are the yama and niyama, which are the result of this attainment of perfection in your own thinking and outlook towards life. By developing objective awareness, you will eventually be able to plan out your actions and your life by deciding, “Okay, right now I want to concentrate on developing my awareness”, and then you work for that. When you raise the level of awareness to a certain degree, you will say spontaneously, “Okay, I feel the urge to develop my dedication to guru now” and begin performing selfless service. Selfless service will give you the ability to reflect on your actions and thoughts associated with that service. You can also experience the different types of negativity people throw at you. Step by step, you can integrate a different principle of yoga into your life. However, the main aspects of yoga to be emulated are the aspects of viveka and vairagya. The rest will follow in due course.

They say yoga leads to perfection, but how can we relate it to the atomic age?

Yoga is the path of perfection, and perfection is not limited to spiritual life alone. Perfection can be reached on every level of being, and the ancient sages of India attained such perfection. We do not realize it, but atomic science as we know it today, is a gift from the Indian sages to the world. It is not something new.

Sage Kanaada was the first man to discover the atomic theory, and in his writings he has mentioned the actual composition of the atom and its uses. Today, scientists are barely beginning to discover the actual uses of the atom. Science has been able to discover the energy within the atom, but it has not been able to discover the soul within that energy. However, this discovery has been expounded by sage Kanaada.

Regardless of what we consider the atom to be, within it there is a soul, there is consciousness. Inside the nucleus of the atom is a soul which can be exploded. When it explodes, the whole universe will again merge back into the soul. Hopefully, with the practices of yoga and the development of our creative intelligence, a 'mad' yogi scientist will come one day who will be able to explode this 'atma' in the atom, and all of us will find ourselves back to square one. Then we will be starting the whole process of creation again.

Many other sciences are also the gift of Indian saints and sages who attained a state of perfection through the science of yoga and by following the precepts of their dharma. Please remember that dharma does not mean religion. *Dharma* means duty and obligation to family, society and the environment in relation to the entire evolutionary process. It is beyond all religions and philosophies of the world.

The emphasis in yoga is on self-discovery rather than on following a set guideline. You will never find impractical philosophies in yoga. It is not a shuddha advaita philosophy; it is not a philosophy which finds a place in morality or puritanism, but one which deals with the realities of life, and how one can overcome them, and discover one's inner nature. It is in this light that we, the sannyasins of the Dashnami Parampara, and especially the disciples of Sri Swamiji, are trying to put forth the yogic science. With this idea in mind we are following the message given to our guru by his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, to take yoga 'from door to door and from shore to shore'.

What is the best way to use pain as a growth-promoting experience?

Swami Sivananda used to say, "Nature throws a man into a crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman." He was very fond of this philosophy of pain and suffering because he felt that through pain, no matter what form it takes, the creative faculties and energies become manifest. When there is suffering and the realization of

suffering, when there is pain and acceptance of pain, then the resulting increase of willpower and determination leads to the investigation of new methods to transcend that suffering and pain.

To improve the mind, pain is necessary, because pain represents the evolutionary process of consciousness. If there is pleasantness and pleasure all the time, the faculties of mind do not evolve, and a kind of stagnation takes place within the personality.

Only realized souls can utilize pleasure, contentment and joy in order to reach higher dimensions of consciousness. We do not have that ability. Only very aware people can utilize the experience of pain and suffering to develop other faculties which are not yet active and evolved. It is in this light that acceptance of suffering is a must, at some stage.

We do not accept pain and suffering because we are under the influence of the *vruttis*, the modifications of mind, and we always want something which is pleasant and beautiful. Acceptance of pain and suffering means that our mind is not the master of our life, but we, as part of consciousness, become masters of the gross dimension of life. Therefore, tapasya has been accepted in the spiritual tradition as being a means to become physically, psychologically and spiritually strong.

I have never met Sri Swamiji personally, but I would love to see him. Would that be possible?

There was a poet who said, looking at a photograph, “I do not know how you are in reality. You might be very rude, you might be very loving and kind, you might be a very destructive person or you might be a very compassionate one. I do not know how you are physically, but whenever I look at your photograph I can imagine you in the way I want you to be.” So, why do you have to think of seeing Sri Swamiji physically? Just look at his photograph and imagine how you wish him to be. The physical presence of the guru really has no meaning at all. It is the presence

of the spirit and the experience of that presence which becomes the living reality.

Should we do asana and yoga practices before we perform full or short shankhaprakshalana?

That is your choice. If you want to do your other asana practice before shankhaprakshalana you can, but remember that the physical body has a limit. At the time of purification of the internal organs, if the body becomes tired, then it may not be conducive to the optimum health of the internal organs. Therefore, we suggest that you do not do any other asana practice because you will be performing many different movements and stimulating the internal organs to function actively, such as the stomach and intestines, and passing water, ten, twenty, thirty times; just the constant running to the toilet is very taxing on the body. The more relaxed you are the easier it will be for the body to respond, but if the body is already tired from the previous asana, then of course the system will be cleansed, but it will take longer for the body to recuperate. So, no asana prior to the practice itself.

In the West there is a tendency for people, especially yoga students, to think of yoga as a series of techniques often limited to asana. Please talk about the real, wider definition.

In western countries there are two concepts about yoga. One is that of physical practices which are done to make us feel good, and the other is of some kind of eastern mysticism which brings about peace and tranquillity.

In general, people have no accurate concept of spirituality and they confuse it with their religious ideas and moral concepts. When they come across something different which does not propound the essence of their moral and religious ideals, it becomes 'non-spiritual' to their limited minds.

Due to this, a tendency has developed throughout the world to follow the direction of self-satisfaction, "I will do this pranayama because it feels right for me. I will practise

this kriya because it feels good; it satisfies my desire, my ego, my like, my ambition." I am sure you must have faced such situations in your life.

If you sit for meditation and see the heavens opening up and angels coming down, you are totally starry-eyed. "Oh, wow! What a wonderful meditation I had!" However, if in the same meditation, instead of heaven and angels before you, you see hell and demons, you come to the conclusion that this is not for you. "I have such horrible experiences! This is not the right thing for me." From where did the angels come? From where did the demons come? Outside or inside? From where does the experience of happiness and joy and compassion spring? And from where do fear, depression and anxiety come? All from within.

The negativity that we feel is as much a part of us as the feelings of happiness and joy, except that we have been conditioned to accept one aspect of life and reject or suppress the other aspect. This has been the trend all over the world from the beginning until now, and it will remain the trend in the days to come. Keeping this in mind, how do we explain yoga?

People have evolved quite a lot from the early days when yoga was considered to be just a group of physical exercise. Sri Swamiji used to say that in the sixties, the era of Richard Hittleman, Roma Blaire and Michael Volin, yoga was used for beauty: improve your figure through yoga, remove wrinkles from your face through yoga. That was the trend once upon a time. Then the perspective changed and people became aware of the other aspects of yoga.

Therapy became important: "If I have backache, I do this yoga asana and it feels good." The therapeutic aspect emerged at the same time as other alternative therapies and medicines: acupressure, acupuncture, Tai Chi, etc. In this new wave of yoga awareness there was more than just the side effect of making the body beautiful. Of course, what they failed to realize was that all the yogis in India are the ugliest of people.

A third wave hit the shore, in which relaxation became the important thing: to reduce stress and learn how to relax. Along with Shiatsu, Swedish massage and the sauna era arrived yoga nidra, ajapa japa and transcendental meditation. Then along came the fourth wave: meditation. Gradually, it appeared that through the natural process of evolution, people are accepting the different uses of yoga, learning about them and trying to implement them.

Yoga is not limited to the feeling of wellbeing in the body or to the feeling of relaxation in the mind. No. The word 'yoga' simply means to combine or to unite, and this refers to the union of our various faculties so that we can become more creative. That has been the concept of tantra also, from which yoga stems – release of energy and expansion of consciousness.

If we can become aware of ourselves then kundalini yoga is the yoga for today, not hatha yoga or bhakti yoga. These two yogas may be necessary to accommodate different temperaments and to help us adjust the lopsided growth of our personality, but the main thrust for this day and age is of kundalini yoga where we can become aware of our inner nature, the deeper aspects of our mind and psyche, correct the imbalances and emerge as a new person who is the master of himself, the master of his mind.

Why kundalini yoga? In this yoga, the theory of the chakras has been well-defined in relation to human perception and experience, and in relation to the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. If we are able to understand our personality through kundalini yoga then it would be like saying that the remaining ninety percent of the dormant brain centres will awaken.

For different times there are different needs. Just as yoga for beauty was the need of one time, and yoga for relaxation was the need of another time, kundalini yoga is the yoga of this age because we are now aware of our own psychology, we are concerned with how we behave, act and communicate.

**How can I live the ideal of karma yoga in day-to-day life?
Can I practise it while I am at my job or should I do some
special selfless work?**

Karma yoga should be done with a definite purpose. It should help bring about a transformation in attitude, behaviour and expression. Karma yoga helps to enhance the ability of the hands; hands meaning expression, creativity, coordination and cooperation between the different areas of life. Any action which is performed with clarity of mind and proper emotional balance is karma yoga.

People perform actions day in and day out. The body is performing actions. The mind is performing actions. The total personality is performing actions all the time. Most of these actions are known as *sakam karma*, actions performed for the fulfilment of a desire. *Sakam* means having the seed of desire. Sakam karma involves those actions which are performed for self-satisfaction, for sensual and mental satisfaction. 99.9 percent of actions fall into this category of sakam karma. Karma yoga belongs to the category of *nishkama karma*, actions performed with selflessness.

Even for one who is involved in the work of an organization, working to support the family, to earn enough money to live happily in life, nishkama karma should be the attitude and approach, because this gives birth to a different form of realization and a different understanding of the vrittis or modifications of mind.

There are two kinds of vritti, pleasant and unpleasant, and they deal with the different experiences we have during the day and throughout life. Vritayaha, panchitayaha, klistaha, aklistaha are the vrittis which control and govern our every thought, action, desire and motivation. Therefore, understanding of the vrittis, realizing which pattern of mind is conducive to the development of our creative abilities and faculties or which vrittis have to be worked upon and transformed, is very important.

With this understanding comes the realization that 'I am simply an actor, a sadhaka. I am not the doer. I am

not the enjoyer. I am only a sadhaka.’ Karma yoga is an ongoing process. It is not a separate yoga which one can learn. It is the yoga of becoming aware – that is all.

In the book Karma Sannyasa it is written that one should dedicate oneself to one’s dharma. How can I dedicate myself if I do not know what my dharma is?

Nobody can tell you what your dharma is. It is something you have to discover for yourself. The concept of dharma is very peculiar and very sublime at the same time.

There are four concepts or stages of life: artha, kama, dharma and moksha.

1. *Artha* represents external security. Nowadays people consider security to be financial in nature, having a good bank balance, but Artha is security in all its aspects – social, emotional, financial, etc.

2. *Kama* is sensual or intuitive satisfaction.

3. *Dharma* is awareness of one’s duties and obligations.

4. *Moksha* is the striving for perfection.

These four concepts have been separated into two groups. Society pursues the path of artha and kama, security and satisfaction, while the spiritually-minded pursue the path of dharma and moksha, awareness of duty and walking the path of freedom.

Even highly evolved souls have some form of attachment, desire or ambition. They might be highly evolved yet attached to their *kaupin*, loincloth. Integration of these four principles is therefore necessary in spiritual life, but in order to integrate them successfully we have to become aware of dharma.

There are two kinds of dharma. One is *yuga dharma*, our present duty and obligations, which is changing all the time. The values of society and the world in general are in constant flux. The other is known as *sanatan dharma*, the Eternal Law, which controls the whole universe.

We make the mistake of trying to become aware of the eternal laws and the concept of sanatan dharma without

fully realizing and understanding yuga dharma, so a misunderstanding takes place in our own belief of what dharma is.

For some, dharma takes the form of a religion, philosophy or tradition, but it is not so. In order to realize what our dharma is, we have to become aware of where we stand, what we receive from life and what we have to offer to life in relation to the totality of existence. This includes our interaction with other people, society, the mind, our beliefs, expressions and so forth.

After we have been able to understand, or at least have a glimpse of the external dharma, then we can try to discover the internal dharma, which is actually a process of jnana yoga. So start whatever way you can and first know yourself. The precept 'Know thyself' is the first step in the discovery of dharma and once you are able 'To see the world in a grain of sand', then you can say, "I have realized my dharma."

Is renunciation the ultimate concept of spirituality?

Renunciation is an aspect of spirituality, but it is not its ultimate concept. The final concept of spirituality is finding a balance between external and internal life, between social and spiritual life, and moving amidst all the comforts and joys of life with spiritual awareness.

If we renounce, what do we renounce? We might renounce a house, we might renounce money, we might renounce a few other luxury items, but we do not renounce our mind. We do not renounce our body, which is our basic structure, and if renunciation is to be complete we have to renounce this whole basic structure from top to bottom.

If we cannot renounce the body and mind then why renounce money and comfort? We can use them in a positive way. Just as we learn to use the faculties of mind in a positive way without renouncing them, we can also use the comforts and joys of material life without renouncing them.

Ideally, the blockages and toxins in the body should be removed before going on to advanced practices. Does staying in the ashram by itself help, or will practices still have to be done?

I think that one should not confuse ashram living with elimination of impurities from the nadis and body. Ashram living is a totally different thing from your own sadhana. You might live for twelve years in the ashram and not do any sadhana, it will make no difference. You may not live in the ashram and continue to do your sadhana, it will make a lot of difference.

Regarding purification, anyone who is progressing along the path will need to purify different systems, the nadis, the koshas, but this should happen naturally. There is a mechanism inside us which tells us when we are ready to go to the next stage, and if we are unsure about this, then the guru is there to decide. He will say, "Okay, now you are ready to go to the next stage; this is what you have to do, for one month more, practise pawanmuktasana." We might have an intense inner urge to stop practising pawanmuktasana and do something more. We might be practising nadi shodhana pranayama and spontaneously we may feel the urge to increase the ratio or something like that. There is a trigger mechanism which tells us, "Okay, go forward." This happens after we have developed some kind of confidence that we have the ability to go towards the next stage.

However, often we confuse this inner urge to learn something more with different concepts and ideas that are prevalent in the mind: "I've been practising pawanmuktasana for three months, I should learn something more. What should I learn? Ah, kriya yoga!" You forget about surya namaskara and the other practices you may have been doing and think only of kriya yoga. Some idea in the mind has taken you thirty steps further, instead of one.

Often there is confusion. Therefore, a guru is necessary who understands the student's abilities and limitations and can say, "Okay, I think you are ready for the next stage."

If the student is having difficulty he will advise, “Stop, go back to the previous stage.” That means more preparation is necessary.

If I, either as a doctor or privately as a friend or relative, put an end to the life of someone who has a terminal disease and who is in great pain, what would the effect be on my karma?

I remember a case some time ago of a person in the United States who had been living in a state of coma for many, many years. There was a big outcry in about the removal of the life-support system and allowing him to die. It even became a legal case. However, everyone felt relief for the person who had been released from their suffering, because what kind of life is that, being attached to a life-support machine for maybe twenty years? It is suffering for the body and also for the spirit, which is unable to leave that suffering. In such cases, it is better to remove the suffering. If your thoughts and intentions are pure, it will not have a negative effect on your karma, rather, you will be assisting the freedom of that spirit.

The pranava has a great influence due to the resonance of its specific sound waves. If it is differently pronounced it may not give the required effect. For example, should it be *Om* or *Aum*? Should the ‘A’ and ‘O’ and ‘M’ be of equal length? Or should it be pronounced with a long ‘O’ and ‘A’ and short ‘M’?

Om is not simply one mantra. It combines various frequencies which are experienced when it is pronounced in different ways at the time of chanting. They are all correct because they create different frequencies within the body and personality, within the brain and mind. They bring about various changes in the brain waves and biorhythms of the body.

According to the mantra shastras, however, the long pronunciation of the vowels stimulates the brainwaves. The sound that you make with the mouth closed, the ‘mmmmm’ sound as in *bhramari* pranayama, helps in giving mental

concentration. The mind becomes introverted and a state of concentration is achieved.

This effect changes depending on how you chant a particular mantra and where you put the emphasis. The frequencies will change and the effect of the frequencies on the psychic body, the chakras, the mind and brain waves will also change.

For example, when we chant the mantra *Om* with a long ‘O’ and short ‘M’ we are simply trying to stop the over-agitated mind, the hyper-activity of the brain, and to induce a tranquil or passive state within the body, a parasympathetic state which is more conducive to the practices of yoga, such as asana, pranayama or meditation. However, in kriya yoga when we chant *Om*, ‘O’ is very, very short, one second and ‘M’ is very, very long, thirty seconds to one minute: “*Ommmmmmmm*.” The frequency of *Om* awakens the pranic field of the chakras. Therefore, different ways of *Om* chanting are utilized and they produce different effects.

The competent yoga teacher is able to guide the student according to their requirements, whether they practise hatha yoga or raja yoga. Each type of yoga has its corresponding style of chanting, because each type is practised for a particular result. For example, if we practise kriya and kundalini yoga, the style of chanting will be different from the style used for raja or hatha yoga, as the effect we expect is much more subtle and deep. If we are practising mantra or laya yoga, we require a different kind of chanting again because we are affecting a different dimension of our consciousness, not the pranic field, but the area between the subconscious and unconscious mind. Ultimately, however, all roads lead to Rome.

I have heard that there are different types of gurus, such as yogic gurus, jnana gurus, tantric gurus or brahmanishtha gurus. What is the difference and what kind of guru are you?

I am a *chela* guru or disciple guru. There are different kinds of gurus and more types than the ones that have been written

about. These names actually represent the method that a guru utilizes to transmit the energy. If you study the tantras, in which different kinds of gurus have been described, you will also find turtle gurus or *kachchap* gurus.

There might be a saint who does not speak or teach anything externally, he simply stays at some place, but people go to him and sit in his presence for some time and they feel good, at peace within themselves. There is no talk, no obvious communication of any kind. Then they leave. He is a guru, because he transmits his energy silently.

There are tantric gurus who use the systems of tantra to elevate the consciousness of their disciples. This is mainly through direct transmission of energy, after due preparation of the disciple. Baba Nityananda, the guru of Swami Muktananda, was a tantric guru. Swami Yogananda was a yogic guru; he dealt more with the evolution of consciousness through the practice of kriya yoga. Swami Vivekananda was a jnani guru; he did not teach any practice. He used to inspire people, open new doors of perception just through talk. He touched certain aspects of the intellect which would force the listener to rethink, change and modify his ideas. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a tantric guru, worshipper of the mother aspect, Kali, and also transmitter of shakti. According to the stories, when Swami Vivekananda asked him if he had seen God, and if he could show him God, he simply touched Swami Vivekananda's forehead and he went into a trance.

Swami Sivananda was a vedantic guru, combining the essence of bhakti and jnana. Sri Swamiji has turned out to be a tantric guru, utilizing the principles of transmission, and using yoga as a means of preparation. I am turning out to be a chela guru, trying to inspire and elevate others through the teachings received by my guru.

Can you explain the concepts of viveka and vairagya?

Animals live in the world of instinct, but human beings live in the world of *viveka*, or discrimination, and they have the ability to attain intuitive knowledge or *antar jnana*. There is

hardly any difference between the two, except that on one side of the scale our mind is closed, like a horse wearing blinkers can only see in front of it. Yoga terms this *bahir jnana*, only seeing that which we can perceive and feel to be true through our analysis and understanding. But what about those events and experiences which we do not perceive through our intellect but through our viveka? Yoga emphasizes that viveka and vairagya are the two wings which enable an aspirant to reach his destination. As long as we have these two wings, we can fly. The whole thrust of yoga, in order to attain atma jnana or enlightenment, is to develop viveka and vairagya.

The modern educational system has neglected spiritual education; only now are people realizing that real education and true health of the body, mind and spirit come after we are able to understand the relationship between and the integration of the social, intellectual, physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of life. All these areas have to be developed simultaneously. We have concentrated on the development of our social, economic, family and individual physical health, but we have not really paid any attention to our mental and spiritual health. A *bhakta*, or devotee, on the other hand, believes spiritual health to be the ultimate, because it gives a sense of fulfilment, balance and joy! However, a person who is living in the world, having responsibilities, obligations and duties to perform, cannot only consider spiritual health, but must also look after the other aspects of life.

Our body suffers when illness and disease attack it. What we experience in our body in the form of pain or disease is a symptom of internal imbalance. Even science tells us that eighty percent of illness and disease have their root cause in the mind and manifest in the body at a much later stage. The remaining factors are external, environmental, bacterial, viral and so forth. In this way, even science is recognizing that, despite our belief that disease is totally physical; the root cause is embedded in the mental and spiritual plane.

To be frank, aside from yogic culture, no other therapy in the world has thus far invented any medicine or practice to alleviate mental and spiritual illnesses. This is due to the integration of the four aspects of yoga. The physical aspect deals with harmonizing and balancing the physiological structure. The mental aspect is in the form of relaxation and concentration techniques like pratyahara and dharana which realign the mind. Social and family life is dealt with by means of the yama and niyama, and our spiritual life in the form of dhyana, which ultimately leads to samadhi. These four aspects of yoga lead to the homogeneous growth and holistic development of the personality.

Asana, pranayama and the system of yama and niyama change our external perception, but they do not make us spiritual: please remember this. Spirituality is an inner unfolding, it is not something which you attain from outside, like a garment with which you cover yourself. Spirituality is a symptom of an integrated and awakened personality. Only when the personality is awake and balanced can spiritual awareness dawn.

The vast stratum of yoga leads to the attainment of viveka and vairagya. We consider viveka to be right understanding, but in yoga, viveka is considered to be a faculty of higher vision. From ground level you can see the horizon only up to a certain distance. As you climb a mountain you get a wider view of the vista and a greater perspective. When you go up in a helicopter or an aeroplane you can see much further still. Therefore, the higher up you go, the broader your view becomes.

The more you internalize, the more you discover yourself and the more your views about life change. Your actions and your performance change; your behaviour, attitude and emotions all change. This is not just a theory; it is the personal experience of every true sadhaka. Practise simple asana and pranayama and see the difference in six months time. Your perceptions will have altered.

The physical practices of yoga can alter the mental perceptions; the mental practices of yoga can alter the

physical conditions. Yoga has always considered that the mind, body and spirit as an integrated unit. The body cannot survive without the mind. It cannot survive without the spirit. The mind cannot survive without the body, nor can it survive without the spirit. The spirit cannot survive without the mind or the body. This is the realization that we must attain: the unity and integrity of these three expressions of creation. The body is one expression, the mind is another expression and *jivatma*, or soul, is the third expression. When these three expressions are combined, that experience is known as life.

We work and function in the world through the body and mind, and this is about the limit of our expression, but when the state of viveka dawns, the spirit begins to manifest. Viveka is not the intellect; it is higher awareness. It is more than right knowledge, as it has been described in many books. Viveka is an awareness of every action, reaction, thought, desire, motivation and ambition. You are aware of your limitations and your capabilities.

The concept of vairagya is similarly complex. Vairagya of what? There is a word in Hindi, 'asakti'. *Asakti*, literally translated, means 'attachment'. Some people say that it is *maya*, illusion, or *moha*, infatuation. There are different forms of asakti. This asakti principle, in whatever form we experience it, has to be realized first. Attachment cannot be avoided. Intellectually you can say you are not attached to this or that, but do you know what it means to say you do not have any attachment? It is the state of death. Attachment means a link, a point where two things meet. Where your body meets your mind there is attachment; where your mind links itself with your spirit there is attachment; where your desires link with your actions there is attachment. The moment you let go of the link, there is nothing.

Although the concept of vairagya has been described many times as detachment, to my understanding, it is not correct. *Vairagya* means *bina raga*, without the feeling of being linked. Beautiful things may surround you, but you try to become free from their attraction. Your real identity

has to be free from the ragas. Have everything, but do not be attached to things. Be non-attached.

Once the qualities of viveka and vairagya have been developed through sadhana and practice, we are able to fly towards a higher destination. Once we begin to move in one particular direction without the dissipation of the mind or scattered energy, but with a focused mind instead, we are sure to attain our goal. Even if the goal is earning money or being successful, we will be successful, because the power of the spirit will be behind our actions. This force will draw us into a current which flows nearer to the shore, where the Lord can pick us up in his hands and place us next to Him.

Sri Swamiji never used to make his disciples feel inferior or ‘bad’ even if they were ‘low-grade’ aspirants. What was that special power he possessed?

No disciple would want to consider himself a low-grade aspirant. There are some things which defy every kind of personal logic. I will always remember the words of Sri Swamiji. He used to say that when a person comes in front of him he may see a million bad things, but if just a tiny good quality is seen behind those million bad qualities, he will ignore the million bad ones and try to bring out that one good quality, no matter what kind of suffering he has to undergo to do it. That has been his sadhana with all his disciples. He has never told you that you have to be like this or you must do that, but at the same time he has tried to put his hand out to grab that one good quality.

Can yoga practice be combined with homeopathic therapy to cure disease?

Let us look at this question from different angles. Disease is caused by a condition of imbalance, either physical or psychological, and our inability to deal with this particular type of imbalance, whether it is caused by bacteria or stress or anxiety. This state of imbalance has to be avoided in order to attain total health.

If we are able to observe and understand our own state of imbalance, then by this process we will be able to attain sound health without the need of any type of therapy, whether it be homeopathy, naturopathy or yoga. Just by utilizing our common sense we can prevent or cure the state of imbalance and the different symptoms that this state of imbalance creates in the body, physiological structure, chemical composition of the body and nervous, glandular and hormonal systems.

Different types of therapy, whether naturopathy, homeopathy, allopathy or ayurveda, tend to create another type of stress in the body in order to overcome an imbalance. Take homeopathy for example: the potency of the little medicines is diluted to one millionth of a millionth, yet a chemical change is being created within the personality, and the normal chemical composition of the body is affected. I am not against homeopathy, I am just telling you the straight fact that just by the intake of a very tiny pill of one millionth the potency, you are still altering the natural chemical composition of the body, and this applies to other forms of therapy also. If you use allopathy, then there is no limit to what type of change you bring about within the system, and this external stress on the normal functioning of the body will not be conducive to optimum health even though it may help you overcome the physiological disease or the psychological problem.

The state of depression or the state of hyperactivity is mental as well as physiological. If you take Valium pills in order to tranquillize the state of mind, it affects the nervous system, slowing down the sensory and motor impulses and deadening the brain so that you do not remain hyperactive and are able to relax. However, you are also altering the normal performance of the nervous system. I do not have to mention all the different positive and negative effects of drugs, you already know about this.

Logically speaking, unless you suffer from a very chronic problem like asthma, you should avoid taking any sort of

medication, whether homeopathic or allopathic. In order to reduce the intensity of a chronic attack, which cannot be helped immediately except by allopathy or homeopathy, you can take the medication; there is no harm in it. However, after taking it, go through your practice of asana and pranayama.

Yoga says that if the body can make itself ill, then it also has the ability to cure itself. I am sure the teachers here will agree with this, because they themselves have experienced how the very simple practices of yoga have helped them overcome many types of chronic illness and problems. In fact, there is an example which I would like to give because it shows how the practice of yoga can help change the normal behaviour and the imbalanced state of the body.

Research was done in Australia and the United States on cancer, involving patients on whom the normal therapies had completely failed. Chemotherapy had failed. Operations had failed. Radiation had failed. Diet had failed. Everything had failed, and the doctors had virtually given a death certificate to the patients, a departure notice saying, "You will remain in this world for about six months. After that we cannot guarantee anything." At that stage, the patients began to practise yoga. They practised yoga nidra, pranayama and ajapa japa, no asanas. They were actually able to reverse the cancerous state, and today they are fully and perfectly well and healthy. If you saw them today you would not even know that at one time they had suffered from cancer.

I like to give this example because cancer is supposed to be one of the most dreaded and incurable ailments. If you try to look at this example with an open mind, whether the cancer was cured through yoga or not, the fact remains that after all medication had failed, the simple practice of yoga nidra, deep relaxation; pranayama, revitalization of body, brain and mind; and ajapa japa helped to overcome the chronic imbalance in the body.

Our body has the energy to deal with any type of situation, no matter how difficult it may be. Of course, that is if you know the correct procedure. If you do not, you may try anything and

nothing may work. Rather, it may aggravate the problem. So you can definitely utilize yoga with other therapies, but in the long run you will have to leave behind all other therapies and continue with yoga, because yoga develops energy, strength and the healing power of the body, rather than relying on external aids. Initially you may utilize external aid, but as you improve, stop the other medicines or therapies and just continue with yoga and let the natural energy of the body, the natural healing power of the body develop.

How can yoga nidra be helpful in bringing physical, mental and spiritual happiness to man?

The answer is quite simple: by relieving tension. When we eliminate tension we attain a state of relaxation in which there is the experience of one-pointedness. There is the experience of tranquillity, the experience of total awareness, not confined only to the external sensory perceptions but also to the internal extra-sensory perceptions.

When we are able to gain a better understanding of our personality, when we know how to utilize the faculties of our personality, our life definitely becomes better. The state of the body, the quality of the mind and spiritual experiences also improve.

When we are subject to physical stress and tension, we experience the physiological imbalance in the form of an ailment, a disease, tension, tightness or stiffness, and so on. If there is tension and stress in the mental personality, then again there will be an experience of internal imbalance. We find ourselves confronted with problems of anxiety, depression and hyperactivity, distracted and dissipated minds, awareness, thoughts, emotions and feelings, and all this reflects on our behaviour, our relationships, our state of being, and at the same time this state of tension affects our spiritual personality.

We have to understand the concept of spirituality before we can determine how the tension influences and affects our spiritual personality. The spiritual personality is a state in

which there is the experience of total balance and harmony between the internal and external perceptions and actions, along with the development of an attitude, an awareness in which we become all-observant. Good things that affect us, we observe and deal with. Negative things that affect us, we observe and deal with, whether we try to do so in an individual capacity or with the help of a group.

Tension can lead to an imbalance in our deeper spiritual personality. Therefore, in the practice of yoga nidra, as we attain physiological relaxation we are simultaneously attaining psychological and spiritual relaxation. When we are able to relax all three together; the body, mind and spirit, we then allow the dormant faculties of the personality to manifest. If, by some method, we are able to harness this potential of our personality then we can definitely make our life happier, more pleasant and more joyful.

Yoga nidra is not considered to be a practice of physical relaxation only. Although the experience of relaxation begins with the body, this relaxation ultimately leads to an expanded spiritual awareness, which is the aim of yoga nidra.

**What responsibility do we have towards our fellow men?
What is real help? When do we interfere in other people's
karma?**

First, what responsibility do we have towards our fellow men? None and a great deal; both can be said. None in the sense that you have your own life to lead and others have their lives to lead; one should not interfere with the life of another individual. Just concentrate on your own development, evolution, and once you reach a certain stage of mental and psychic evolution, the desire to help others and a method of helping them will automatically manifest. You do not have to try. Then, at that stage, when you ask what responsibility we have towards other people the answer will be that we have many responsibilities.

Every individual, although unique, shares the basic qualities of humanity. We must encourage the growth,

understanding, and creative utility of these basic personality traits. This understanding will come after we have evolved through the first stage, but primarily, we should ask ourselves where we stand in our own life, what our limitations and abilities are, and learn how to recognize the different manifestations of our own personality and mind. Only then can we try to help others, because unless the realization of our own qualities takes place, unless we know how to work, we cannot tell others how to work. Unless we know a system, process or method, we cannot impart a system to others. So, first individual consciousness has to evolve and then universal consciousness. Both answers are therefore applicable.

Second, what is real help? There are different concepts of 'help'. In a social context we understand help in a different way than in a personal context. The spiritual context is different again. Individual help is according to our capacity to encourage and assist in the proper management of people's lives in terms of moral and emotional support, and trying to find a solution to the problem. In the social context, help can come in the form of assisting communities, groups or businesses to become self-sufficient, to stand on their own feet. Maybe some kind of charity will be required.

Help takes on a different meaning according to the different areas of life and individuals involved, and we must always remember that we have our own limitations. Do not try to over-extend yourself, because the moment you do, problems will arise and you will fail. Within your own capacity, learn to express yourself in a qualitatively better way. This is the aspect of human creativity which, if you are able to generate even five percent, is more than enough to help practically the whole of humanity.

The problem with us is that we are not creative. We are self-centred. We try to satisfy our own ego, and where the ego is involved creativity cannot take place. Here again spiritual concepts are involved: self-observation, self-abstinence and the principles of yama and niyama have to be followed.

Third, I do not think that it is possible to interfere with anyone's karma. We cannot interfere with our own karma, so how can we interfere with somebody else's? Only the masters or gurus have that ability. People like us do not have it. Do not worry about interfering with somebody else's karma, because that possibility does not even exist for you.

How do yantras work and how can we utilize them?

The word yantra is made from two words: yana and trayati. *Yana* means vehicle or tool and *trayati* means liberation: a tool or vehicle of liberation. Therefore, yantra is a method through which we can liberate our consciousness and it is a part of tantra. The word tantra has a similar combination: tanoti and trayati. *Tanoti* means to stretch. Mantra is also another part of tantra. *Manah* or mind plus trayati: liberation of the mind.

We live in a world surrounded by different types of symbols and ideas. Internally, visual symbolic perception is more predominant and powerful than verbal audio perception. Intellectually we talk, but our mind analyzes the symbols. For example, when we see a house, it enters the mind as a symbol and then come the words of identification. The house is beautiful, but originally what the mind perceived was the symbol and not the words, "This is a house." Originally the mind perceived the symbol of the flower and not the words, "This is a flower." The grasping power of the mind is more in the form of symbols and figures than of words. One image equals a thousand words.

There are certain symbols which tend to create a type of psychic activity or awakening. They are known as yantra and mandala, and they influence and affect the areas of our subconscious and unconscious mind.

In most of the yantras and mandalas, the lines, circles and all other aspects of it are in total harmony. They complement each other. They are combinations of different harmonies, and just seeing a yantra alters the mental perception.

Different yantras work on our psyche in a variety of ways, and therefore they are utilized as tools for meditation.

Performing trataka on a yantra with concentration will help stimulate and transform the mind.

If yoga is part of tantra then why are liquor, flesh, fish and cohabitation prohibited according to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, when the same are essential for obtaining tantric siddhis, as extolled in tantric literature?

Yoga is part of tantra, and in tantra they do talk about the *pancha makara* sadhana, the five M's: *madya*, *matsya*, *mudra*, *mansa* and *maithuna* – liquor, fish, grain, flesh and cohabitation with males or females. However, these items are not to be taken literally, because in tantra itself it is explained very clearly that if by drinking wine one were to become self-realized, then every drunkard in the world would be a self-realized person. If by eating meat one were to attain self-realization, then the whole world would be self-realized, with the exception of India. If sexual intercourse were the method of attaining self-realization then nearly every human being would be realized, but unfortunately it is not so. Therefore, you have to rethink the meaning of fish, meat, liquor, grain and cohabitation. You should do some study and try to understand the symbolic meaning which I will explain only briefly.

This sadhana has been prohibited in yoga because we do not know the correct procedure of doing it. Without a proper system one cannot progress correctly in spiritual life. I will give you just one example. If you want to quote from *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* you should also remember that in it a full description has been given of amrita, which comes from bindu down to vishuddhi, lalana and then manipura chakra. This amrita is known as madhu. It is not the drinking of external liquor which tantra advocates, but of this amrita which falls from bindu visarga.

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, it is further mentioned that there are two fish which move in the river within the body. If you study yoga you will know that ida and pingala, the channels of lunar and solar energy, are also known as Ganga and Yamuna. This is the concept of the two rivers within

the body in the form of energy flow. The two fish that swim in these rivers are the movements of energy. Eating fish means full pranayama, i.e., stop inhalation, stop exhalation: kumbhaka.

It is in this light that you will have to understand the concept of the tantric sadhana of the five M's, and I would suggest that you read *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* with a more critical mind, in order to understand this question and answer it yourself.

Can yoga help us to come to terms with death?

Let us look at it another way: can yoga help us to come to terms with birth? We hold a stick in our hands; one end of the stick is birth, the other end of the stick is death, and in the middle is life. All the things that we do, all the philosophies or religions that we follow, all the techniques that we practise or even evolve, occur somewhere in the middle between birth and death.

At present, we are standing in the middle of the stick, looking towards death. Why can't we just turn around and look towards our birth, because on both sides there is the unknown. After death is the experience of the unknown and before birth also is the experience of the unknown. We fear death because we are unable to stop our walk towards death. Life is walking towards death, and you know that after twenty, thirty or forty years, or maybe even after one day, you are just going to be finished!

There are certain practices of tantra which help us to understand the experiences that the spirit has after death and before birth, but these are very powerful meditations. They can either totally destroy every kind of concept, identity and idea that we hold at present, or they may improve the quality of life, depending on the state of our inner evolution, on how well we are able to accept and handle this new awareness and this new change in perception.

The philosophy of death is a very simple one. Everything created, everything known and identifiable, is called

nashwara, something which decays, but there are many things which are not created: other dimensions, other realms, other forms of life, different from this present form. These other aspects are not easily understood through the agency of spirit. They are known as *ishwara*, something which does not decay.

We often find the word ‘ishwara’ in books. It is translated into English as being a personality of God, or some form of divinity. However, that is not the correct definition. When we live in the world of matter, then every type of life form is *nashwara*. It is experienced in this way. However when we live in the world of spirit, our experience is different. By spirit I do not mean the ghosts and goblins which sometimes frighten us at night. No, spirit means the inner identity. I will give you one example.

Some time back, an English lady came to the ashram and she used to get terrible headaches. When she had these headaches, which was practically twenty-four hours a day, she would become uncontrollable. She had gone to every kind of specialist in Europe to find a cure for her headaches, and she was under very heavy medication. She had had these headaches from early childhood. Sri Swamiji was not there at the time, he was out travelling, and so the ashram teachers taught her the yoga practices for relieving headaches: *neti*, *pranayama* and other things. Rather than improving, the headaches became worse and worse. Nobody could understand why.

When Sri Swamiji returned, this lady went to him with about twenty bottles of pills; different potencies of aspirin, Valium and sleeping tablets, just to make her sleep at night. He asked her about her yoga practices, and finally he suggested that she stop every kind of practice. Then he asked her if she trusted him. She said, “Yes, I trust you.” Then he said, “Can you do something for me?” She said, “What?” He said, “Do not take these medications. Even if you feel that your head is splitting, don’t take a single pill.” She said, “Okay, I’ll try.”

For one day she managed it with great difficulty, but by the second day it was not possible. She came to Sri Swamiji and said, "Look, I am going to take medicines, otherwise my skull is going to crack." The feeling was so intense that she was swaying. She could not even stand because of the headache. He told her, "No, stop everything, no matter what happens, even if you die. I will take care of you; I will bury you, but do not take any medication!"

This lady had a very powerful will. She did not take a single pill. She used to scream and yell at night. After about four days, Sri Swamiji called her again and said "Listen, I want you to practise one form of meditation." He taught her a practice. Still there was no improvement. She was yelling, shouting, screaming, running, clutching her hair. It was a horrible sight – a person in such pain and suffering!

On the eighth day while she was meditating, she just became unconscious because of the pain, and in that state of unconsciousness she went to sleep. When she woke up the next morning, for the first time in her life she did not have a headache. She came rushing in to see Sri Swamiji and said, "I have no headache. I feel so light, so happy, so joyous!" He asked her what had happened. She said, "I was doing my meditation and there was an intense splitting pain, so intense that I became unconscious. Then I went to sleep and I had a dream."

What was the dream? She identified the setting of the dream as a place in Wales. In the dream, there was a man who she felt might have been herself in a previous life. He was a miner, and in the early morning, with a helmet and shovel, he would walk to the mine and start work. Suddenly one day there was a rumbling noise. The miner looked up to see the ceiling caving in. There was instant fear and pain for a split-second as the ceiling hit him on the head, and he died.

Afterwards, in a satsang, Sri Swamiji said that this lady's pain had been carried through her consciousness as a seed, as a samskara or karma, and after a gap of so many years that samskara had begun to manifest. Since it was not physical,

but something embedded in her consciousness, no external medication could help her. However, through pure willpower, when she stopped the pills and the pain became intense and unbearable, there came a point when she suddenly relived that whole experience in the form of a dream. After reliving the experience, the samskara was finished.

If we consider this to be true we can understand one thing, that even though the body is finished at the time of death, something continues which the yogis have called consciousness. The thoughts may die; the desires which are related to the external or objective world may be finished, but the consciousness carries with it certain impressions, which it has been able to receive in this lifetime, and which become our samskaras and karmas in the next. So, the consciousness continues, but due to our externalized attention and attachment to the body and the pleasures of this world, we tend to forget our identity with consciousness, and identify with the external person. This is where fear comes in.

There are many meditation practices in tantra which guide the awareness through the various layers of samskara into the dimension of the unknown. Here you experience your body and personality dissolving and finishing, and you experience the continuity of consciousness. Some people teach meditations for conscious dying, and in many books certain practices are taught and explained. There are things that one must do at the time of death or in preparation for death. These are traditional practices which are taught to people who are fearful and attached to their present state of life, who fear the loss of identity, and thus hamper the evolution of consciousness.

These practices are applicable to certain types of personality, but not to all. They can be applicable to the emotional personality type, or in some ways to the intellectual personality, but definitely not to the psychic, intuitive personality, nor to the dynamic personality, because the level of consciousness, the level of perception and grasping, is different.

Each personality has its strengths and weaknesses, and can manifest itself either positively or negatively. I am reminded of the one word which can be used either negatively or positively; that word is 'no'. When you are at a party and a friend offers you another drink, saying, "One more for the road?" what do you say? "No" or "Okay"? If you say "Okay" and take it, then that last one for the road may become the last one of your life, and if that happens then you will think, "Oh, I should have said 'no'!" Saying "No" can also affect a person's self-confidence either positively or negatively. "No, I cannot do it" shows a lack of self-confidence, while "No, I can do it" shows an increase in self-confidence. You see, one word can be utilized in many ways, and one personality can be utilized in many ways.

If you are aware of your personality, and are able to develop your willpower and creative energy, then there is no reason why you cannot come to terms with death or birth. It is the strengthening of mind which changes our way of perceiving and realizing. If I am weak, I will be fearful. If I am strong, there is a natural tendency in me to accept any and every type of challenge. There is no fear; rather there is an expectation of gaining something which can make one more efficient and creative.

Looking at it from this aspect, yes, yoga can help. For weak people there are meditational practices, but they have to be learned under the guidance of a teacher, who can monitor and observe you.

Please talk about mantra and the importance of individual mantra.

It may not be possible to understand the details of the mantra because they go beyond the limits of rationality. The traditional concept is that mantras are composed of sound vibrations which influence and alter the performance and activity of psychic centres within the gross and subtle bodies.

While we repeat a mantra intellectually we are try to understand the meaning of it from a religious viewpoint,

we also try to get into the feel of the mantra, but psychically something else is happening. For example, take the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*. Intellectually, we may think that *Om Namah Shivaya* is the mantra of Lord Shiva, and we may have a concept of Shiva as being a deity who lives in the mountains, smears ash all over his body, has a trident and carries snakes with him.

From a religious point of view, *Om Namah Shivaya* is a prayer to Shiva, “I bow down to Shiva” but psychically, the mantra, which is composed of different sound syllables, is acting within the psychic personality beyond the limits of rationality and stimulating the chakras. As it progresses, this process is experienced in the form of enhanced mental and psychic perception. Attainment of concentration, willpower, one-pointedness or clarity of mind is a symptom of a balanced, integrated mind and psychic personality.

Each sign of the zodiac has a variety of combinations of mantra. For the development of our personality, a particular mantra is required. There are two kinds of mantra. One is universal mantra and the other is personal mantra. A universal mantra is one which can raise the level of consciousness despite the differences in individual personalities. Personal or individual mantras can, according to our requirement and personality, induce certain inner changes. Personal mantras have been furthered classified into two categories: one which can change, and which is only suitable for the present time, and the other which does not change. The latter is the psychic mantra.

There are many mantras, because the entire system of the human personality is based on different sound frequencies. Sound is being created all the time within the body and mind. Whenever there is movement there is sound, whether audible or inaudible. Just the act of moving the hand in front of us makes a sound, but that sound is inaudible to the human ear; it is a subtle sound. The thinking process, according to yoga, also creates a sound; any kind of mental activity creates a sound frequency. This is the concept of

nada, bindu and kalaa. *Nada* means vibration, *bindu* means source or starting point and *kalaa* means manifestation creation, organization, the law of Nature, or you can say 'spiritual physics'. Bindu is the beginning and also the end. Bindu contains both microcosmic and macrocosmic awareness. When you are distant from bindu it looks like a small dot, and when you are within bindu it is infinite. Therefore, the experience of perceiving the microcosmos and macrocosmos both take place in one bindu.

Whenever there is creation, interaction of elements, mind or something external with something internal, there is bound to be *nada*, sound vibration, and mantras are representative of this nada. There are thousands and thousands of mantras. It is not possible to classify them by saying that this one belongs to this kind of personality and that one belongs to a different kind of personality. It is only by understanding the individual that initiation into mantra can be given, and therefore it is always said that mantra should be taken from a guru who can understand the complexities of the mantra signs, and not from any other person.

Which practices assure balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, or between consciousness and prana?

There is a distinction between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and consciousness and prana. Sympathetic and parasympathetic stimulations and experiences are physical in nature, being related to the nervous system, while the experience of consciousness and prana is psychic in nature. Of course, in one aspect of existence there is a link between the two. In the gross or manifest aspect, the link between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and consciousness and prana is visible in the concept of ida and pingala. Pingala represents the sympathetic nervous system or the vital pranic energy. It is also related to the solar force, the energy behind all motivation and drive which we feel throughout

our personality. Ida represents the lunar force, the tranquil passive energy, and is related to the parasympathetic nervous system.

If you are asking for practices which influence the nervous system, then of course, yoga asanas themselves will help to bring about a balance in the activities of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The definition of asana or posture in the traditional texts is *sthiram sukham asanam*. *Sthiram* means stable, *sukham* means comfortable, *asana* means posture. The dynamic postures do not fall into this category, but the stable postures, the static asanas, in which you can remain for some time without feeling any discomfort in the body or mind, do. The dynamic postures help prepare the body to become stable and comfortable in the static asanas, and eventually every dynamic asana can also take the form of a static asana. Just imagine yourself practising half an hour of meditation in *mayurasana*, the peacock! Eventually the serious practitioner of hatha yoga should achieve this type of body control. Every individual must find a suitable posture which is conducive to the attainment of concentration, and the awakening of prana shakti. It is not necessary to utilize the traditional postures of padmasana, siddhasana or sukhasana.

This physiological balance, when attained, develops the awareness of prana and *chitta*, consciousness. The gross externalized awareness is slowly transformed into subtle internalized awareness, where one becomes aware of the movement of prana and the existence of consciousness throughout the body.

The nervous system is directly related to the electrical activity of the brain. When the sympathetic nervous system is very active, we begin to experience increased beta frequency, and our mind becomes dissipated. Do you know the expression 'scatter-brain'? It is the result of this hyperactivity or dissipated activity of pranic energy.

Physical postures affect the psychic personality by either dissipating the stored up energy and consciousness or by

concentrating it. When someone who is feeling hyperactive practises bhramari or nadi shodhana pranayama, within a few minutes they will experience tranquillity in the mind and brain. On the other hand, if a person is depressed, his awareness and energy are centred inside and he is unable to come out of the state of depression. This situation is due to hyper-parasympathetic activity, and by practising bhastrika or kapalbhati pranayama this concentrated state of energy, which draws the mind inwards, can be rectified.

The actual change in the realm of chitta and prana takes place during the practices of pranayama and pratyahara, because although pranayama is related to the breath, it stimulates certain psychic centres situated within the body. We can try to understand it in another way. If a person who is hyperactive, tense or dissipated begins to practise pranayama, the controlled inspiration and expiration begin to relax and control the activity of the nervous system. Then, with the regulation of the nervous system in the body, the automatic activities, such as the heartbeat, blood pressure and so forth, also come into balance.

This state of physical balance will gradually influence cerebral activity, lower the high beta frequency, and induce the state of alpha, which allow one to feel more relaxed and at ease with oneself. The dissipated mind slowly comes to a state of relaxation, focused to a point. The balancing energy of ida then begins to flow in the system and slowly the hyperactivity begins to reduce in intensity and one becomes centred. The body has been worked upon on the level of the nervous system, on the level of the autonomic functions of the body, on the level of the brain, and then gradually on the level of external perceptions, centring both them and the mind.

When the mind has been centred, or focused, then the state of pratyahara is experienced. In the state of pratyahara the first experience is of gradual withdrawal of our externalized perceptions. That means no dissipation of our faculties. Then gradually, as we become more and more centred in pratyahara, there is a broadening of our

internal perceptions, awareness and consciousness. As our consciousness develops we become aware of the pranic flows in the system, and by becoming aware of the interaction of prana with the body, the mind and the world in general, we are able to change the outward flow of prana.

Those who are familiar with the concept of pranayama know this to be true, especially where prana has been discussed in the form of the *vayus* or winds: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana, the five manifestations of prana. When the apanic energy which is situated between the navel and the perineum is moving down, as it is right now, then all our mental perceptions are externalized. With the reversal of the apana force, we are able to transcend the activities of the subconscious and unconscious, which are related to mooladhara and swadhisthana. Another example is prana, which is situated between the hollow of the chest and the throat, and which is an upward-moving energy. In day-to-day life it is responsible for the negative expressions of emotion and desire, such as depression, anger, frustration, hatred, jealousy, selfishness. Through the reversal of the pranic movement, we become aware of these limiting areas of our personality, and develop the other aspects of positive emotional qualities.

Therefore, in one sense we can say that there is no distinction between prana and consciousness, because prana then becomes the manifest experience of the unmanifest mind. The two nervous systems, the sympathetic and parasympathetic, are mainly physical in nature, relating to the body and the brain.

What is the relationship between the rhythms of the different musical instruments in kirtan?

Generally people do not know how to participate in kirtan. They start with a rhythm and continue with it throughout. The rhythm should change according to the drumbeat. The hand clapping and the cymbals have to change according to the drum. However, mostly in kirtan the drum is playing one

thing and the cymbals something else. People do not know the correct procedure; the drummer follows the singer and then everybody else follows the drummer. The rhythm of the cymbals varies. There are times when they increase in tempo and times when they become very, very soft and slow.

So what rhythm should the singer play?

The first two lines are sung without any accompaniment. In the second repetition of the kirtan the drum begins, and continues without any other instrument. Then, when the drumbeat is established, the cymbals begin. There has to be a gap between everything. It is only when everyone is playing and singing in harmony that the clapping starts, and this is usually a spontaneous thing as the energy begins to mount.

Music is a science. One can sing in any way according to one's feelings or emotions, but the process is like driving a car: turn on the ignition, go into gear, release the handbrake and accelerate, it is the same sequence.

Where do the guitars fit into the scene?

If you know which kirtan is going to be played, the guitar can start before the kirtan. After one or two lines on the guitar, then come in with the harmonium and kirtan.

Sometimes people just let anything come out in kirtan. Is it better to be more refined?

Initially, I think it should be spontaneous, whatever comes, but as you become more involved in kirtan and the ears grow more attuned to music, then it is better to follow a sequence. It is always better to have a properly trained group.

Can you explain the International Yoga Fellowship Movement symbol?

This symbol represents ajna chakra, considered in yoga to be the command centre or the seat of the guru within us, and it is controlled by the mantra *Om*. On either side there are two petals and on each petal is a mantra. The mantra *Ham*

represents the solar energy within the body and the mantra *Ksham* represents the passive, tranquil aspect of the lunar energy within us.

Ajna chakra is the centre where these two energies, emanating from different chakras meet. At this point they become one before going on to sahasrara chakra, the seat of higher consciousness. So this symbol represents the gateway to higher consciousness.

Could you please advise me if I could use the geru cloth, and could you tell me the true meaning of geru?

Geru is the colour used by sannyasins and swamis of a certain tradition or sect. There are many traditions and sects of renunciates, swamis, sadhus and sannyasins, and not all of them wear geru. Some wear white, some red, some black, and some an orange colour. We belong to the Dashnami order which was founded by Adi Shankaracharya, and we wear geru which represents that tradition.

Geru is neither orange nor ochre but something in between. It is the sign of a sannyasin, a symbol of fire. Just as fire can burn anything, whether it is rubbish or something good, it signifies that the mind of a sannyasin has to be like fire. Sannyasins should not be affected by good treatment or ill treatment. They should be able to accept everything as fire does, and yet maintain a unique identity, by burning up all their samskaras, karmas, desires, attitudes and ambitions.

The geru colour represents vitality and dynamism. Anyone wishing to tread the path of *viveka* and *vairagya*, right understanding and detachment, can use this colour. Even if you are a householder you can use it, because it will help you create an inner spiritual identity. It will provide you with inner strength.

What is the general meaning of Shanti Path, and why is it repeated at the end of a sadhana class?

Shanti Path has two meanings. It is the mantra for peace and prosperity which is traditionally chanted at the end

of every kind of yogic or spiritual session. It is chanted to infuse the body and mind with positive feelings and vibrations. This is the main purpose of Shanti Path. It also helps to remind the psychic personality, the personality which is influenced by the vibrations, of a spiritual goal or aim.

The yogis have always envisaged the human being as a spiritual being. This is not just a concept. They see this spiritual being in the form of a body, and they see the mental being in the form of a body in the same way as we perceive the physical body. Whether you are Chinese or Japanese, Indian, American, or Australian, no matter whom you may be, the body is basically the same: two arms, two legs, one head, and two eyes. It is like the stamp of God which he has put all over the place. The height might be different, the colour might be different, and there might be certain variations here and there, a bit more on the waist side, a bit more on the shoulder side. In the same way, the mind is also seen as having a body, and the eccentricities of the mind, the fatness, thinness, slimness, fullness or the short stature of the mind, are the individual mentality. The mind also has a definite shape, a figure, unperceivable to us at present.

Similarly the *atma*, the spiritual body, has a shape, a figure, unknown to us at present. Just as we deal with the intellect on the gross manifest plane, the spiritual body or *atma* interacts in the form of vibrations. It understands. In order to communicate we use Hindi or English or any other language, but internally, in order to communicate there is the language of vibrations which is universal. Many people feel it in day-to-day life. We get a nice feeling from somebody and we get a horrible feeling from another person without even conversing. This is due to an interaction of vibrations.

Mantras influence and awaken the psychic vibratory field. Whether you understand them rationally or not is irrelevant. By chanting or repeating a mantra, as per the tradition, some form of internal change is brought about,

which again may not be experienced immediately on the outer level.

Each mantra awakens a particular centre, not chakra. Apart from the chakras, there are many psychic centres around the petals. Each mantra can and does stimulate one of these minor psychic centres. A combination of various sounds can influence, alter and induce a change in the total performance of a chakra.

Therefore, when we chant Shanti Path at the end of any yogic or spiritual session, a few things happen. After the session of yoga, satsang or kirtan there is a change in the atmosphere around and within the body, in the mind, in the structure of emotions and spirit. When we create a vibration, it directly affects the spiritual body.

One example can be given to roughly explain this state. If you are totally involved in some kind of activity and another person comes and asks you something totally different, for a few seconds you have to think. You have to divert your attention. You have to direct the mind from the previous topic and start thinking of the next. You have to start thinking along another line. Already a change has taken place. This also happens in our normal pattern of behaviour, and in our emotional feelings and reactions.

When we practise meditation, asana, pranayama, kriyas, satsang or kirtan, the mind is distracted from its natural pattern of behaviour and is attentive towards another pattern of behaviour and action. If at that time a mantra is chanted, it creates certain ripples and then it dies down. It takes another session of yoga to again reach the same state. It is like vacuuming a very dirty carpet. The first time you do not get much dirt, but as you keep on going over the same place again and again, even the most subtle dirt which is right at the bottom is sucked up. So the repetition of mantra is just a process like this.

Shanti Path is a process of somehow hitting the vibratory carpet of our personality, again and again, over and over again, so that eventually the vibrations or the sound awakens

those psychic centres which correspond with that vibration. Of course, the translation of the mantra itself is quite nice if people can follow it and understand it.

*Lead me from the unreal to the real,
from darkness to light,
from death to immortality.
May there be happiness, peace,
wellbeing and contentment everywhere.*

In many of the yogic texts and scriptures we find that there are five different types of prana. Where are they located in the body and what are their functions?

According to yogic principles there is only one form of energy which is known as mahaprana or the first prana. There are five minor manifestations of mahaprana, which in yogic terminology are known as the *prana vayus*, the pranic wind or air. Energy is one and we believe that to be pranic energy. This energy has divided itself in order to function on the physical plane.

Prana vayu, which is the first manifestation of mahaprana, is situated in the upper thoracic region: the ribcage, lungs, heart and throat. It controls the functions of all the internal organs situated in that area. Prana is considered to be an upward-flowing force or energy.

The second manifestation of mahaprana is known as *apana vayu*, or the apana wind, and this is a downward-moving force situated from below the navel right down to the perineum. It controls the functions of the large intestine, liver, kidneys, etc.

The third manifestation is *samana vayu*, situated above the navel and going up to below the ribcage. It controls the digestive functions.

The fourth manifestation is *udana vayu*. It controls the actions of the legs, arms and head.

The fifth manifestation, *vyana vayu*, is situated throughout the body. You can consider it to be the reserve force, which assists and helps every other prana.

One of the main objects of yoga is to awaken these different physiological and psychological manifestations of mahaprana in the personality. With the awakening of these five different pranas, mahaprana is awakened. The awakening of mahaprana leads to the awakening of downward energy centres which in turn lead to an expansion of human consciousness. If anybody asks you what yoga is, you can definitely tell them that it is a means to awaken mahaprana.

Can celibacy promote the growth of spiritual life and the achievement of super-consciousness?

It depends on what you mean by celibacy. The word in Sanskrit is *brahmacharya*, which is abstinence from sensual pleasure. It is a combination of two words: 'brahma' and 'acharya'. *Brahma* means the supreme self or consciousness; *acharya* means 'to follow in the footsteps of'. Those who follow in the footsteps of supreme consciousness are *brahmacharis* or celibates. The concept behind this is that when the desire to attain self-awareness or self-realization becomes intense within us, we have to let go of our attachment to sensory and sensual pleasure. Many people limit brahmacharya to the relationship between man and woman, but that, in many ways, is incorrect. Brahmacharya does not mean that.

There are two schools of thought, vedantic and tantric. In vedantic philosophy it says that we should practise austerity or *tapasya*, firmly committing ourselves to a strict discipline and following it, and not give fuel to our *vasana* and *kamana*, our desires. One of the most powerful desires and the most difficult to overcome is the sexual desire. Since we do not have the ability to say no to a sensual desire, in vedantic philosophy there is a total severance of this type of intimate relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, so that the physical act does not fuel our desire to have more and more, thus losing ourselves in sensual pleasure.

According to tantric philosophy we are permitted to have the sexual relationship, but with the mind directed

towards the higher experience behind the relationship. It is not just the sensual or sensory experience, or merely a physical experience, but more of a psychic experience. When we compare these two different ideas of Vedanta and tantra, we find them contradictory. However, in regards to sadhana, having a normal, everyday relationship is more conducive to spiritual growth and development, provided we are able to follow the system outlined in the tantras. However, for those who are weak-minded, who have a weak nature and who get caught up in the trivialities of life, the vedantic system is good.

We cannot say that celibacy or abstinence from sensual pleasure is 'good' or 'bad' for spiritual development. It varies from individual to individual, and according to the temperament and strength of our inner sankalpa. If we have firm determination, commitment and drive, if our willpower is firm and unshakeable, then it is not necessary to remain a celibate. If it is weak then celibacy is a necessity. Celibacy is simply a preparation of the mind in order to overcome the deep desires of mooladhara and swadhisthana.

When and how should we teach yoga asana to children?

According to the yogic tradition we teach the practices of surya namaskara to a child only at the age of eight, and that practice is done only until the age of eleven. After that a few other asanas are included, but actual yoga practice as such, according to tradition, begins after the age of fourteen. In the meantime, say between the age of eight and eleven, only the practice of surya namaskara; between eleven and fourteen the practice of surya namaskara combined with the practices of trikonasana and three backward-bending asanas: bhujangasana, shalabhasana and dhanurasana. After the age of fourteen, they begin the practice of traditional asanas.

By following this system the physiological and hormonal growth, as well as the emotional balance in the body, will be properly channelled. There will not be any imbalance. Of

course, depending on the physical or mental condition of the child, there might be some other asana or some other practice of hatha yoga incorporated, but as a general rule, eight to eleven, eleven to fourteen and onwards, are the steps in teaching yoga to a child.

When we have a lot of creative energy within us, should we express it or will it change into spiritual energy so that the need to do creative work will fade?

Spiritual energy is best expressed in the form of creativity, and if creative energy is utilized in our day-to-day expressions with awareness and understanding of the creative aspect of life then it can be a first step in understanding spiritual life.

Consider the various yogas. Karma yoga is for developing the creative aspect of external life: interaction, behaviour, expression. Jnana yoga is to awaken the creative aspect of our intellect, not just the external manifestation, but intuitive wisdom. Bhakti yoga is the transformation of gross emotions into a subtle and deep realization of our deeper nature.

In a sense it is the purpose of yoga to awaken the creative aspect of the head, heart and hands. If these aspects are not fully awakened, then our development will be lopsided; there will be no balance. Once we are a balanced composition of the three aspects, the head, heart and hands, the creativity which takes place in external life influences the life within and awakens our psychic creativity. There is no question of transforming or stopping creative energy. Rather it should be fully expressed.

Can you suggest a general daily yoga practice for the average person who is not suffering from any health problem?

For a balanced practice in daily life for a relatively healthy person: the practices of surya namaskara (5–10 rounds), certain practices of trikonasana which allow the body to move sideways, twist and bend, a few practices in which you can invert your body, such as the shoulder stand and plough pose, and certain practices of pranayama which can

generate vitality and induce a state of tranquillity, such as nadi shodhana and bhramari pranayama. For achieving complete relaxation, yoga nidra can be included, and for concentration, the practices of trataka and japa.

If you can follow these few practices daily, you will find that you benefit in every respect.

When can we begin to practise kriya yoga?

Before you learn kriya yoga it is important that you first develop the ability to visualize and concentrate, and that you know about the location of the chakras along the spine.

When you close your eyes and try to see the chakras inside, different people use different types of visualization. Visualizing the chakras in the form of points of light is one type of visualization. Letting the awareness rise from mooladhara to ajna, bindu and sahasrara, touching each and every chakra like the level of water rising up a tube, is another way of visualizing and experiencing the chakras. A third way is by physical touch. First, have somebody touch you along the spine, and after a couple of rounds let them stop touching you, and simply try to maintain the same awareness as if somebody is actually touching you.

Of course, there is one difficulty. Every novice wants to learn kriya yoga thinking it is a very advanced practice of yoga, without first perfecting the techniques of pratyahara and dharana. In order to practise kriya yoga it is necessary to have perfection and mastery over pratyahara and dharana which will first prepare the mind and awareness for any experience which you might have at the time of kriya yoga.

I was taught at the Sivananda Ashram that the Mahabharata war did not really take place, that it is only a war inside the mind? Please comment.

That is the belief of many people. The yogis, in order to explain something, give different examples using the symbology of the Mahabharata. They say that Arjuna represents a particular state of mind, Krishna represents

one aspect, Bhima represents another aspect, and in that sense it can be said that the Mahabharata war is taking place internally. A particular state of mind is being explained using a metaphor.

In Swami Sivananda's books he talks about that war. Many times in our own lectures we say that the Ramayana war is continually going on with Ravana fighting inside us. The ten heads and twenty hands of Ravana are also symbolic. The description represents a particular quality or attribute, weakness or strength of an individual. This was the way of ancient story telling.

The Mahabharata war took place five thousand years ago, and the Ramayana predates it by approximately five or six thousand years. When events take place they are fresh in the mind, but as time passes the knowledge is lost, and we superimpose our own ideas on them. It happens with everything, not only history, but also with religion. In five thousand years we might give a different description of Christ. In ten thousand years we may even question whether the Son of God actually came or not. Our approach and attitude will be different.

Is it necessary to have an ishta devata? Can ishta devata and guru be the same? What is the relationship or the order of importance of ishta, guru, mantra and practitioner?

Generally, people confuse ishta with a form of God, a deity, and it is difficult to describe what it means. In Sanskrit, the word is *iti* which means 'here you stay'; *ishta* means to sit or to stay. Ishta is the symbol utilized at the time of meditation as a point on which you can fix the mind and hold it. This image can be of any object, any abstract symbol or visual idea which represents a positive quality. Therefore, traditionally, the concept of ishta is that of a deity representing a positive quality that is within the devotee or practitioner.

Having a symbol is necessary, because while one is meditating, different things are occurring inside. There is an awareness of the body which is sitting for meditation, of the

aches and pains, comfort and discomfort in the body. There is also awareness of the mantra and of the mala moving while you are trying to meditate. There is awareness of the external environment – if it is noisy you will feel it; if it is peaceful you will feel it.

To stop the functions of the vrittis, a symbol is used, representing an idea, a concept, a quality with which we can identify, and the guru can be such a symbol. Thus the mind is fixed, and once this fixation has taken place then it will become the form of ishta. Any other object or event can become a form of an ishta; even a stone, a flower, or a scene, anything you can identify yourself with completely, and which holds your attention for an extended period of time. Sri Swamiji has always said that three things are important at the time of meditation: the psychic sound (mantra), the psychic breath (awareness of breath flowing in the nadis), and the psychic symbol (either a yantra or one's ishta). With awareness of these three the practitioner can go quite a long way.

Can yoga be separated from religion?

First, we have to understand the original concept of religion which is the same as that of yoga. The Latin word *relegare*, from which the word 'religion' has come, means to unite; and the word *yoga* also means to unite. The unity of the self with the Higher Self is the meaning of the word *relegare*, and it is also the meaning of the word *yoga*. Our concepts and ideas, however, change over time. Different civilizations and cultures come and go. Thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, and religions change, but the basic underlying truth is the same.

There has always been individual effort to understand the transcendental and divine. No matter what name we give to this process of understanding or realization, it is the same throughout the world. It has been said many times that the ancient cultures in Egypt, Greece, the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, had yoga as part of their religions. The North American Indians and the

Indian civilizations of South America had yoga as part of their culture too.

The religion of the Indians in South America was different from the existing religion in Egypt, which in turn was different from the ideas, belief and concepts of the Scandinavian countries. However, the practices were similar and in some cases, the same. This has been proved by discoveries during excavations in search of lost civilizations, cities and cultures. Archaeologists have come across many different statues in traditional yoga postures. In South America they found statues, dating back six, seven and eight thousand years, in perfect yoga postures. In Egypt, Scandinavia and Greece they found the same statues and descriptions. We can construe from this that, despite the philosophical, ideological, and religious differences between cultures and civilizations, the effort towards the discovery of the Self was a uniform effort.

Whatever the reason, whether political, social or natural, the death of a particular culture or civilization caused the practices of yoga to disappear also. The whole science, however, was preserved in India, and it became part of the Indian way of life. We hear about yoga from very ancient times. From the time of Rama and Krishna and even before, people used to practise hatha yoga, raja yoga, and all the different yogas. The Vedas provide the best proof of this. Different yogas, pranayamas, and postures have been described in them, and it dates back to about five thousand years BC.

All the philosophies and religions dealing with the intellect and the development of knowledge and perception became the exoteric utterances of every civilization. The practices and methods which are adopted to discover the truth, however, become the practices of esoteric experience. Yoga falls into the category of the esoteric experience and not the exoteric utterance. Therefore, we can definitely say that even though it has been a part of the Indian tradition and culture for many thousands of years, yoga is still different

from religion, philosophy or tradition. It stands by itself as a means of developing self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-realization.

How can we control and stop the chattering mind?

We try very hard to stop the mind. Whenever we sit down, thoughts come. We become agitated and there is a struggle. One aspect of the mind fights against the other aspect and greater tension is built up. We become cranky, confused and depressed.

In order to get out of this continual ongoing chatter, we then look for something external to divert our attention because the chattering will not stop. When the attention is diverted to some other place, and is identified with something out there, then we stop the observation of the chattering mind, but nevertheless the mind continues to chatter on, day in and day out. Some people are aware of it and others are not. We only become aware of the chattering when we try to find some kind of silence and peace in order to balance and energize ourselves.

Stop struggling with the mind and begin to observe it. Be an objective witness to your chattering. Become a third person and observe the process. After some time this increased awareness will lead you away from the chattering of the mind.

It is like the asteroid belt in our solar system between Mars and Jupiter. So many rocks and stones are floating here and there, and when we try to go beyond Mars, our ship is hit by those rocks and we come back to Earth. It is because we are trying to fight and struggle through them. This is exactly what is happening with the mind also.

Simply observe the movement of the mind, the thoughts, the chattering. If we can just observe from which direction the rocks are flying, then through that observation we can navigate either above them or under them and get to the other side. The first thing is observation, and for this we have the practice of *antar mouna*, inner silence.

In the book *Meditations from the Tantras*, the practice of antar mouna is described only in relation to thoughts, but the same technique can be utilized to deal with different personality conflicts and the upsurge of emotion and desire, hatred, anger, jealousy, compassion, love or harmony. Observe, and then find a way to slip through that belt which binds the human personality. Once you slip through that belt, you will once again experience tranquillity.

If you practise antar mouna, start with the thoughts first, and then the next thing that comes, perhaps an emotion. Go through every experience and manifestation of personality, and you will have cleared the mind-field. As long as you remain confined in the mind-field, one false step here or one step there is likely to blow the mind up. So, slow and steady wins the race.

What benefit do we get from mouna that we cannot get from karma yoga?

Mouna means maintaining silence and karma yoga is the yoga of action. Mouna is practised as a form of sadhana, because when you stop speaking over an extended period of time, the mind, the extroverted consciousness, becomes introverted. It is at that time that you can really observe the different patterns of consciousness, thoughts, emotions, desires, ambitions, and so on. When you try to maintain mouna, you may find it difficult because it is human nature to speak, to say something regardless of whether it is reasonable or unreasonable.

When you cut off this sensory experience, which is one of the major expressions of the human personality, then the mind has to find a way to express its energy in some other way.

Many swamis are given the sadhana of maintaining silence. In the early days of the ashram, there was a swami who practised silence for seven years. He was responsible for the development of the ashram's public relations. He was also the person who set up the printing press that we have today. That man used to go out to different places,

communicate with people, make purchases, and sell things, but he maintained complete silence throughout. Not a word came out of his mouth. When, after seven years, he finally spoke he could not even recognize his voice because it was so strange.

Some people who practise silence find that their inner perceptions and faculties are sharpened; they become very acute and precise. That is because the energy is being directed to other forms of understanding and expression. Through the practice of mouna we develop the attitude of a seer, one who observes everything, and that is also a part of karma yoga. In order to develop the attitude of karma yoga, you have to observe yourself, your actions, and your reactions. You have to develop the attitude of a seer and that can be attained through the vow of silence.

What is the difference between meditation and yoga nidra?

Although the practices may be similar, the concept of yoga nidra and the concept of dhyana, or meditation, are poles apart. Yoga nidra is part of pratyahara: withdrawal of sensory perceptions, developing internal awareness, reducing external awareness. There are four states of mental awareness and concentration: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. In the practices of pratyahara, yoga nidra being one of them, we begin the process of rediscovering our faculties and our mind. There are many different techniques of pratyahara along with yoga nidra such as antar mouna and japa.

In pratyahara we withdraw the external awareness and look within. We learn how to step from one room into another room. After we have knowledge of the dissipated tendencies of the mind through the practices of pratyahara, we try to fix our mental attention at one particular point. Then this process becomes *dharana* which means simple concentration. Right now, we may be practising dharana because I am concentrating on speaking and you are concentrating on listening.

However, in meditation there is total identification between myself, my mind and my mental faculties. When we say, “I am going to practise meditation”, it is not right. Meditation is a state of mind, it is not a practice. It is a state where the mind is fully focused and all the faculties are brought together.

Take light, for example; from an ordinary bulb, light is dissipated, but if by some means we can concentrate the light into one point, it takes the form of a laser beam. Similarly, when the faculties of the mind, which are dissipated in all directions, are brought to a point, then that is meditation or dhyana. In this state of meditation you will learn how to use this combined force for your psychological and spiritual evolution.

This process eventually culminates in the state of samadhi. You have the ability to step into one dimension of life which is external, and another dimension of life which is internal, and to use creativity in both these areas. Perfect balance, total and homogeneous awakening of the human personality, when all dormant centres of the brain are fully awakened, when there is no distinction between conscious, subconscious and unconscious, and when there is only one frame of consciousness within you; this is known as super-consciousness or *samadhi*.

Dhyana is a state prior to that. If you are going to sit in a meditation pose and go within, do not say, “I am going to meditate”, because meditation is not a practice, but a state of mind, and yoga nidra is a practice which helps us develop this state of meditation.

Is a flexible mobile spine necessary for success in the practice of the kriyas?

No. One can be fully stiff and still practise the kriyas and get the same benefits. It is not necessary to have spinal flexibility because if you are unable to perform the posture of the kriya physically, it does not matter. Do the mental practices involved in the kriya, following the breath, taking the mind

to the chakra, visualizing the chakra, hearing the nada, etc. You can do all that mentally. It is not necessary to have flexibility of spine for the practices of kriya.

Can a person achieve self-realization without practising yoga?

The meaning of the word *yoga* is to combine, to join or to unite, and self-realization is a state of consciousness where all the faculties of the personality and consciousness have been combined. You have control over their functions. This idea of knowing everything, of realizing everything, of experiencing everything is the concept of yoga. Therefore, there cannot be any difference between self-realization and yoga.

You cannot define yoga as a set of practices specifically meant for the body, mind and spirit. Physical postures are known as *asana*, breathing techniques are known as pranayama and every practice of yoga has a name. Yoga is a common word representing the total developing states of mind and consciousness. For example, a building is known as a house, not as a room. In the same way, yoga is the name of the house, and within that there are many rooms, many doors, many windows, and so on. Open any door, any window, whichever you like, but you are within the house.

To say that yoga is different from self-realization, or that yoga is a system which leads to self-realization, is not correct. Yoga is a philosophy which leads to yoga. Self-realization is a practice which leads to self-realization. I see no difference between yoga and self-realization. All branches of yoga: hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, nada yoga, laya yoga, whatever name you give them, have yoga as the end goal. Yoga is a totality. In fact, we can say that another name for self-realization is yoga.

How should we deal with the senses on the spiritual path?

In the Upanishads it has been said that to deal with the senses one should develop the attitude of a witness, *drashta bhava*. However, it is difficult to totally cut off the experiences of the sense objects, and it is not even advisable to cut them

off completely, because then the mind will have no object, no substance to which it can cling in order to maintain an identity. It would be like throwing a person who cannot swim into the middle of the ocean. What can he do? He cannot swim; he cannot do anything in order to save himself. That is the type of state we will encounter if there is a total cut off from sense objects.

I will give you an example. When we see an orange, we experience an emotion there and then. We look at the orange and say, "Yes, it is nice, I would like some" or "No, I would not like some." The appreciation of an orange represents a type of involvement. If you look at the orange in a detached way your awareness becomes objective, then there is no attachment. There is appreciation but there is no emotional involvement. This happens when we are able to develop the attitude of a witness.

Another example; sometimes we are aware that we are dreaming, and when we know that we are dreaming we can enjoy the dream. When we do not know that we are dreaming, however, we suffer if it is a bad dream, and we experience pleasure if it is a good dream. The quality of enjoyment is quite different when we know that we are watching the dream as a witness. Once we are able to develop this, there will be relaxation of the mental faculties, which will gradually evolve as time goes by.

Yoga says that there are two types of sensory experience. One is external, and deals with the body, brain, mind, awareness and consciousness. The other is internal. It does not have anything to do with the body. However, the same senses, sensory awareness and sense perceptions exist. Let us examine vision. Right now what we see externally is processed by the brain and comes to the mind. However, even in the absence of this external sensory awareness, the sense of vision can continue, because it is also an internal process. The same applies to all the senses: sight, sound, taste, touch and smell.

Yoga talks clearly about the three states of experience which are in the form of three different bodies. You experience

the world through your gross body, *sthula sharira*, you also experience the world through your *sukshma sharira* or subtle body, and through your *karana sharira* or causal body.

Each *sharira* or dimension utilizes a form of communication with the world of events, situations, perceptions and knowledge. As you go deeper into the state of meditation, as you develop the subtle faculties of the mind, contact is made with these various dimensions of the mind where the experiences are stored and experienced. You transcend your gross body, and eventually begin experiencing your subtle body. The senses of the *sukshma sharira* are alive and real. As you go deeper you experience your *karana sharira*, and this experience is real.

What happens in a dream? You dream, but while you are dreaming, that dream is real. If somebody is coming to murder you in your dream, will you know that it is a dream or not? No, it is very difficult to know. You will feel fear, sweating and trembling. You will be running. You will have exactly the same experience as if the event were taking place in real life. However, when you wake up, there is a big sigh of relief; thank God it was all a dream! That is a state of consciousness, whether we call it the dreaming state, or *swapna avastha*, in which the mental experiences are real.

In the same way, the experiences of the *sukshma* and *karana* bodies are also real at the time of meditation. A *dhyana yogi* has the ability to go from one body to the next without breaking the link, the alertness of mind. That is *dhyana yoga* or meditation.

In Swami Muktananda's book *The Play of Consciousness (Chit-Shakti-Vilas)* he talks about a 'blue pearl'. How does the blue pearl relate to tantra and yoga as you or Sri Swamiji understand it?

There are three states of consciousness. We are not talking of the conscious, subconscious or unconscious. These three states of consciousness are known in yoga as *sthula sharira*, *sukshma sharira* and *karana sharira*. Translated into English

they mean the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body respectively. This translation is only to give us an idea of the concept of sharira.

The idea is represented in tantra in the form of a *Shivalinga*, an oval-shaped stone. There are three types of Shivalinga. One is black, the second is smoky or hazy, and the third is luminous and transparent. Two chakras in the body, mooladhara and swadhisthana are represented in the form of black Shivalingams. Three chakras, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi are represented by the hazy linga or *dhumralinga*. The Shivalinga is black; the dhumralinga is hazy. The two major chakras, ajna and sahasrara, are represented by the *jyotirlinga*, the luminous linga.

The black linga represents the dense form of energy: matter, earth and water, the final states of creation, the aspect of Brahma, the creator. The hazy or dhumralinga represents the subtle elements, that is, fire, air and ether. We can say that the qualities of preserving and maintaining are represented here, the aspect of Vishnu, the maintainer. If you are familiar with the concept of the Indian trinity it is easy to understand this. The experience of the last two, ajna and sahasrara, belong to the dimension of spirit or *atma*, the subtle mind and the supreme consciousness. They are represented by the quality of Shiva, the quality which never changes, the quality which is pure experience; knowledge.

These are the three main states of consciousness according to the philosophies of tantra and Samkhya. Samkhya talks of the different experiences or qualities of consciousness in relation to the chakras, in relation to the awakening of the different areas of consciousness. tantra also talks about the same thing: the chakras, consciousness, energy, shakti and kundalini.

In the process of the awakening or purification of consciousness, whichever term we may want to use, the yogis have always viewed consciousness in the form of a living experience: consciousness and awareness on one end of the stick, and unconsciousness on the other end. As we

move away from intellectual and emotional consciousness, perceptions gradually reduce until externally we experience total unconsciousness. On one end we have the full faculty of the senses. On the other end we have the total cessation of the senses. As we move from one end of the stick to the other, the effect of sensory perception and sensory experiences reduce until there is no external awareness at all. When we reach the so-called 'unconscious' state, other senses are experienced.

Tantra says that as we go deeper and deeper into ourselves, we become aware of the three states of consciousness, the lingas, and finally when we are aware of the jyotirlinga it can be experienced in the form of a luminous body, a transparent, invisible, colourless or colourful body.

Some people who have a particular type of mental and psychic activity experience this jyotirlinga differently. Swami Muktananda experienced it in the form of a blue pearl, but that experience was actually of the jyotirlinga. Other yogis experience it differently, in the form of pure light. All the traditional texts say there is nothing but the experience of colourless light. Samkhya says it, yoga says it, tantra says it and even Vedanta says the same thing. It depends on the flow, the motivation, the force behind our consciousness that can make us experience the same jyotirlinga in one form or another form. This is irrelevant, but the experience of light is the most common experience.

Another experience is of nothingness, voidness, *shoonyata*. Buddha experienced this voidness, where there is nothing, no attachment and therefore no detachment and he gave it the name *nirvana*. In this state there is no happiness, there is no joy. Nirvana or the experience of the jyoti or the blue pearl or samadhi, represents the same state of consciousness in which we experience our spirit.

When the mind is restless and there is difficulty concentrating, what appropriate yoga practices are recommended?

For immediate relief from the restless mind, the practices of pranayama are very beneficial and advisable. It is not

necessary for you, if you find yourself disturbed, to sit down in the marketplace and start closing your nostrils to perform nadi shodhana. Just practise psychic pranayama instead; mentally imagine, “I am breathing in through the left nostril, I am breathing out through the right nostril.” You do not need to plug the ears; just start humming like you are humming a tune, “Mmmmm.” This will help to instantaneously break the state of restlessness and anxiety.

If the condition persists, then of course on returning home you can do other practices like yoga nidra, antar mouna and mantra meditation to centre yourself. All practices of dharana and pratyahara will assist you in this process.

How can we find a real sankalpa for yoga nidra and when teaching yoga nidra, how can we help students find one?

Sankalpa means positive resolve. You must consider what is appropriate for you at this stage of your life and form it into a constructive, positive, uplifting and creative resolution. If you keep this in mind then any change you wish to make in life can take the form of positive willpower and determination, and that will form the basis for your resolution.

This is the beginning of a sankalpa. When a person who is a chain-smoker or drug addict finally decides to stop the habit for the benefit of his body and personality, he can make the resolve, “I wish to quit smoking” or “I wish to stop using drugs.” Sankalpa begins with the removal of negative traits in our personality; things which are harmful or detrimental to the growth of our body, emotions, mind, intellect and personality. This is the start of sankalpa.

Then gradually, as we remove all the kinks from our personality, the sankalpa can take a more transcendental form. Transcendental means that which is not related or confined to the expressions and experiences of the body, emotions, mind and intellect, but which goes beyond them.

It is not necessary to have a sankalpa in the very first practice of yoga nidra. Take your time. It can be months before you decide upon a sankalpa. You will have to go

through the process of self-analysis and identify the faults which you consider detrimental to your growth and wish to overcome. Take that as your resolve to begin with. If the mind is receptive, you will find that any sankalpa you choose will take effect practically overnight.

One lady who had been practising yoga nidra came to me and said, “Swamiji, I have a big problem. I have to change my sankalpa every week because whatever I wish for is always fulfilled.” “That’s very nice, what do you wish for?” I asked. She said, “I made a resolve that I would earn a lot of money this week, and I have done it! Could it be due to some miracle or is it God’s grace?” I told her, “No, it is due to your mental receptivity.”

If you have trained yourself to be receptive and sensitive, then any suggestion that you put to yourself in the form of a sankalpa will definitely fructify in the course of time, even if it is to earn money. This happens because along with the mental preparations, there will also be changes in the behaviour of your psychological and physical expression, and that change is to be expected. Without this change your resolution will have no effect.

Therefore, in the practice of yoga nidra, you must be unbiased about your requirements, aims or ambitions and find a point of balance in your personality. You have to be able to relax your mind and increase its receptivity and creativity. If you put a seed in unprepared ground, it will not grow, no matter how much compost you cover it with. Before planting a seed you have to turn the soil, fertilize it, mix some compost into it, and make sure that there is water, air and the warmth of the sun. After this, whatever type of seed you put into the soil will grow. If it is a small flowering plant seed it will grow and give you flowers; if it is a tree seed then it will grow into a tree. In the same way, you have to prepare the ground of the mind when practising yoga nidra before you plant a sankalpa. Form your sankalpa only after careful self-analysis and discovery of the real requirements that will be conducive to your overall growth and development.

While doing trataka and gazing at the eyebrow centre, I become the flame, with the tip burning in ajna. Does this symbology have any relevance?

That is the state of dhyana, total identification with the object of concentration. It is a very good state of mind to achieve, because in normal life there is always a disassociation between our awareness and our experience. Whatever that experience may be, we are observing it, but if through some method we are able to become one with the experience, or with the event that is taking place within us, then that becomes the state of dhyana. This experience should be intensified with further sadhana.

Is yoga nidra only for physical relaxation or are there deeper meanings behind the practice which we have to discover?

Although we associate yoga nidra with deep physiological relaxation, it is not a practice devoted exclusively to this. Physical relaxation is just the first step. *Nidra* means sleep, yogic or psychic sleep, so yoga nidra means a form of conscious sleeping. There is a difference between conscious or psychic sleep and ordinary sleep. In ordinary sleep we become totally oblivious to everything that is happening around us and to the experiences we are having. We do not know what is happening to our body. We neither know what is happening to our mind, nor how the time is passing. However, we know one thing; the mind is not relaxing! Even at the time of ordinary deep sleep, the mind is constantly at work. Generally, people never try to stop or to relax the mind.

One of the prerequisites for optimum health of body, mind and emotions is to have the ability to stop the fluctuations or the movement of mind for some time. Those people who can stop their mind for some time will definitely improve the quality of their life, thought and action. Generally, however, we pay little attention to our mind and its experiences. We take everything for granted. We wake up in the morning, go through our daily routine

and go to sleep at night without thinking even once about what we are feeling. We tend to become aware of ourselves only when there are problems, only when there is conscious tension, only when there is frustration, anxiety, depression, nervousness and uncertainty.

It is a very well known fact that when one goes to sleep at night, even in bed, one is constantly thinking about the problems of the day and what one is going to do the next day. We go to sleep, but when does sleep come? We never know. We continue to think about problems, conflicts and the tensions of life; the mind still continues to revolve around the same things. Therefore, the quality of sleep is never really satisfying. In the span of our eighty years of life, fifty percent of the time we pass in sleep, and for the remaining fifty percent we are awake. We are unable to utilize the fifty percent sleeping time creatively, for our progress, for our material, psychological and spiritual upliftment.

Let us first discuss the most immediate benefit of yoga nidra, related to our day-to-day life. In this process of deep conscious relaxation, apart from the relaxation of body and the experiences of the mind, something is missing. What is missing? It is the proper preparation of the mind which can help us progress in life. We all want to relax, we all want to rest, we all want to sleep, and if we can organize our sleep in such a way that it becomes creative and not unconscious, that it becomes a conscious sadhana, then our whole life will undergo a tremendous change. We will have the ability to deal with our day-to-day problems and conflicts with much greater ease. We will glide through life effortlessly.

In the initial practice of yoga nidra there is awareness of body, breath, sound and the various experiences within the mind such as visualizing, experiencing and remembering certain things. Eventually, however, we go deep into the subconscious realms. There we are asked to awaken the dormant faculties of the mind. We are able to block out the external experiences which are disruptive to a harmonious personality, and develop the creative aspect of our nature.

Much research has been conducted on the practice and principles of yoga nidra, which has been explained in detail in Sri Swamiji's book *Yoga Nidra*. If you want to improve the quality of mind, sleep, memory, willpower and creative nature, you should read this book. If you learn to practise yoga nidra properly, you will not need to go to anybody to find a solution to your problems. You will not have any physiological or psychological problems, because this practice will give you the ability to withdraw the internal mind from the external mind.

There are two types of experience in yoga nidra: one concerns the external mind, things that we perceive and experience externally through the senses and intellect. The other concerns the internal mind which is responsible for the formation of our personality, behaviour, beliefs, thoughts and actions. Generally, however, we do not know when the external mind stops and the internal mind begins. There is never any break for the mind where it can relax and think about solutions to these problems. By rationalizing, we can achieve some kind of solution.

There is another faculty of mind which is known as the sixth sense. We do not know what this is because we have not experienced it. Yoga nidra is a practice for realizing this and many other dimensions of the mind.

Please talk about the different stages of kundalini awakening.

In *Kundalini Tantra*, which is one of the most comprehensive theses on kundalini, the yogis have clearly defined the awakening of kundalini, which occurs in many stages.

Kundalini awakening will not take place if the chakras are closed. That is point number one. The first step is the awakening of prana; the second step is cleaning the passage of vital energy, awakening ida and pingala. The channels of ida and pingala awaken after there has been some type of awakening at the level of prana.

I will give you an example. In our body there is constant movement of prana, but is not awakened prana. Only about

fifteen to twenty percent of the whole pranic energy is flowing within us right now and all the different pranas are moving in different directions. Apana flows downwards and other types of prana have different types of movement.

The awakening of prana entails all the various manifestations of prana moving in the same direction. A kundalini yogi or a yoga practitioner tries to change the flow of prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana and to intensify that experience. This is the subject of many kriya yoga classes. We attempt to experience the reversal of pranic flow. That is stage one.

Stage two is the balancing of the ida and pingala flows of energy. Physiologically, we can consider ida and pingala to be part of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, an expression of the performance of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. However, this is only the physical manifestation of ida and pingala. Their psychic manifestation and awakening will take place after the pranas have begun to move in one single direction, and that is known as the flow of sushumna.

Sushumna awakens after ida and pingala are working in coordination with each other and they flow simultaneously. The balanced flow of both ida and pingala leads to the awakening of sushumna. It means that there is harmony at the level of the pranic body. Physiologically, we may relate ida and pingala to the left and right nostrils; we may say that when both nostrils flow evenly, sushumna flows, but we are only talking of the physical aspect in such cases.

After the awakening of ida and pingala, awakening of the chakras takes place. With the awakening of the chakras there is a gradual transformation of consciousness. Mooladhara chakra awakening represents the awakening of our instinctive nature, our deep instincts and urges over which we actually have no control, for example the sexual urge, the feelings of security, insecurity, hunger, etc. The corresponding centres in the brain also awaken and the practitioner is faced with an influx of instinctive experiences. When swadhisthana

awakens, a corresponding change in consciousness takes place: the awakening of the psyche and the subconscious and the unconscious mind, and the manifestation of the samskaras and karma.

Kundalini will awaken only after all the channels of perception are cleared and the consciousness is totally purified. A balanced state of consciousness and energy in all our bodies is known as the awakening of kundalini. Yogic literature is quite clear about this.

In meditation we may feel some type of movement along the spine in the region of the chakras, and we may attribute that experience to kundalini because of our pre-conceived idea that kundalini is in mooladhara chakra, and that at the time of awakening it will move up along the spine, but that pre-conceived idea is not necessarily the correct one. What we experience is the first initial awakening of prana in these psychic centres or chakras. This awakening will subside after five to ten minutes or several hours. However, once kundalini awakens, there is no way it can subside.

You will always feel as if you have taken a big dose of ganja and there will be no coming down from it; it will be a total experience and will alter the state of perception, the state of consciousness completely.

Sincere aspirants should develop an initial understanding of prana and of certain psychic movements of which they were not previously aware.

An understanding of how the chakras and pranas are awakened also develops. Sometimes the sensations may be physical, sometimes mental, sometimes emotional, and sometimes psychic. So why do we consider only the physical experience in the spinal cord as the awakening of kundalini? Why do we not consider the emotional traumas which are a process of inner purification as the process of kundalini awakening? I will leave it up to you to answer these questions.

In everyday life, events, information, sensations, and so on place themselves immediately in the mind. Is there a technique which could help open the way of the heart to allow these events to be perceived and felt directly?

You have arms and legs which help you move when you are on land, but they work differently when you are in water. One does not walk on water; one swims. It is the same with our sense perceptions. When we open our eyes we can see, but this same perception changes when we are in a different element. If you open your eyes when you are under water, vision is there, but the experience is different. In the same way, as long as we remain human beings and continue to work with our mind, senses, intellect and emotions, we will continue to perceive the world according to the instruments that we possess. Therefore, anything that we see will continue to place itself on the mind. Thoughts, desires and emotions will continue unless we can disassociate ourselves from the experience. Disassociation will allow us to perceive things in a different light, but how can we disassociate from the intellect, the mind and the vrittis?

This has to be our training. Experiences and events which place themselves in the mind have to be looked at objectively, because even now there is a lot of information being received by the mind and the brain. However, we are not aware of the total amount of information that is going in, perhaps one or two items at the most. We have come into this room so many times, at least I come here practically every day, yet, if you were to ask me how many windows there are in this room, I would have to count them. Although my mind has all the information, it is not at the conscious level, but if I could go into some meditative state where I could become aware of that information, then I would be able to tell you the number of windows without counting. This type of information has also entered the mind. Therefore, we cannot simply say that we are aware of events and experiences on the conscious level alone. We are constantly receiving a lot more information subconsciously

and unconsciously. How do these experiences bypass the mind and intellect?

The actual question is of bypassing the mind, so that nothing is thought out and put through the mental process. However, remember that ninety percent of our experiences are mental and the remaining ten percent may be considered psychic or non-mental. The question here is about finding a method through which we can discover the centre of our being, and in that centre of being perceive the information without any other agency.

Let us now consider the practices of meditation by which we can discover the process of our thoughts. Thoughts are symptoms of an experience. A thought may come, “Oh, this is nice”, or “That is nice”; it is a symptom of some nice experience you have already felt previously inside you. We have to go to the source of that experience and discover the origin of the thought. In this manner, we have to go through each and every experience of life.

Once we are able to discover the source of our external expressions, then we will be able to bypass the mind. Of course this is a very long process; however, we can begin by practising the techniques of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. These three techniques of *raja yoga* are aimed at this realization. *Pratyahara* means consolidating our externalized, dissipated, mental, physical and psychic energies. *Dharana* helps us realize the centre point of our being, and *dhyana* means developing a different form of perception and understanding, which is more intuitive and in tune with the universality of consciousness.

Which is superior, realization of God or attainment of wisdom?

It depends on which way you look at it. In my opinion, attainment of wisdom is more important than realization of God, because it is through wisdom and understanding that we can perceive divinity. God can manifest at any time, in any form, but if the eye of wisdom is not open then we will

not be able to recognize that divinity. The recognition of the divine nature takes place through wisdom or through the realization, “Yes, I see God manifest in that form.”

Many saints and realized souls have had this experience. They have seen divinity in a leper, in a dog, in the most ordinary human being. God manifests himself in a particular form to impart some realization. Realising God in everything is what is important. Therefore, wisdom in my opinion is more important than God-realization. When you have attained spiritual wisdom, you realize God in every aspect of creation and you experience the unity between divinity and nature, between the manifest and the unmanifest.

God-realization will take place when there is purity of heart and simplicity of thought, when there is clarity of mind and unity of spirit. These qualities are different to wisdom or knowledge. One can be fully ignorant but still have that purity within, and see God. We have to realize the aspect of unity within us first.

When the sun was setting it asked, “Who can provide light to the world while I am gone?” Electricity kept quiet. You know Munger electricity – it goes off for ten hours of the day, comes on for two hours only – it had to keep quiet! Torches kept quiet, batteries also. In this manner, they all kept quiet and thought and thought about who could provide light to the world in the absence of the sun. Finally, one small weak oil lamp said, “Look, I am nothing in comparison to you, but I will try my best to provide light while you are away.” Instead of looking for the sun or something outside to replace the sun, it is better that we try to light the lamp within us.

Can you talk about the seven lokas?

There are many human attributes or qualities which have been defined in yoga as chakras, lokas or patalas. The general term for *loka* is dimension, a new dimension of perception, a new dimension of experience, a new dimension of living. This definition also applies to the chakras and

patalas. Before I go into the description of the lokas, chakras and patalas, which I will have to do in order to explain everything to you properly, I would like to say something about the triple division of human nature according to the tantric and yogic systems.

1. *Pashubhava* or the animal attributes, tendencies and qualities, or the animal personality, is one aspect of our nature which can also be defined as the instinctive personality. In this state, a human being has no control over his actions, thoughts and expressions. In other words he is led by his instinct.

2. *Veerabhava* or the warrior attitude defines the range of human qualities in which we are striving to attain something despite all the hurdles and difficulties that we may face in life. We have one aim and one direction which we follow. This urge to obtain something represents the range of human nature.

3. *Divyabhava*, the divine attributes, the divine qualities that are inherent in the experience of the totality of consciousness, is the third aspect of human nature.

There are centres which represent an area of attainment, a state of expression, a state of being in each of these three different ranges of human personality.

Generally, when we are aware of the chakras we say that they are situated in the body. First is mooladhara, second is swadhisthana, third is manipura, etc., until we come to sahasrara. Each chakra has been associated with a pranic activity and a state of mental experience, the evolution of consciousness and the evolution of energy from gross to subtle. According to vedantic theory there are twenty-one such centres. Samkhya, yoga and tantra also corroborate this. All four schools agree that seven of these chakras belong to the range of human personality, to veerabhava, the attribute of the warrior.

Animal awareness or pashubhava also contains seven centres of energy and consciousness which are also chakras but they are named differently. They are called patalas

and are also seven in number: *atala, vitala, sutala, talatala, mahatala, patala and rasatala*.

Then there is the range of divine perceptions and attributes. These are the seven lokas: *bhu loka, bhuvah loka, suvah loka, mahah loka, janah loka, tapah loka and satya loka*.

Now comes the interesting part. Just as human beings experience the awakening of chakras and kundalini and the alteration of our natural state of mind into something more perfect, in the same way there is kundalini which rises from the patal dimension and comes to mooladhara. There is also a kundalini which rises from sahasrara and goes up to satya loka. Kundalini here does not mean the snake which moves through the chakras and through the passages of ida, pingala and sushumna. That is only a symbolic representation.

Kundalini is a psychic awareness which combines the experience of 'good' and 'evil' both, as in the story of Adam and Eve. It was the snake which enticed Eve to have that fruit. The snake is not considered as bad or evil. In the yogic theories it is considered as the knower of both the positive and negative energies, as both the good and bad. It is always lurking in the darkness in mooladhara chakra but once it awakens the understanding and the awareness of good and evil are both attained.

Another thing that happens is that, because of the performance of sadhana, purification takes place at different levels of consciousness, so that, although one gets the knowledge of good and evil, there is really no danger of going the evil or negative way. Many think that this means they will become evil, they will become bad. No, that danger is not there at all. It is nonexistent.

Those of you who have studied kundalini yoga and the description of the chakras in detail will always find that, along with the positive quality of a chakra, a negative quality has also been represented. Along with a good attainment in the awakening of a chakra a bad attainment has also been represented. Both are occurring side by side and there is no

negation of any experience either positive or negative, either sublime or ridiculous. Both are accepted.

One more thing. It is clear that in the human body, within the human range of perception, and consciousness, our kundalini rises from mooladhara to sahasrara through the seven chakras. After the kundalini has risen up to sahasrara, the theoretical description is that her energy merges with consciousness. They join together. They fuse into one entity. In one experience, Shiva merges with Shakti. In this dimension, that is the last experience that we can have with this body and with this limited mind. After that, evolution still takes place, it has not stopped, but it continues on a different level, in a different dimension.

The lokas represent the areas of the further awakening of an enlightened mind. Therefore, yoga says that even enlightenment is an ongoing process. It is not the end.

What is the difference between control and suppression? How do we know if desires have to be exhausted, suppressed or controlled?

There is a big difference between control and suppression in spiritual philosophy. I am using the term ‘spiritual philosophy’ and not just yoga, tantra, Vedanta or Samkhya; all philosophies are included. The difference is that in suppression you are not aware of the reactions that may be taking place or that will take place later on, but in control you are. The key factor is awareness. Lack of awareness is suppression and having awareness is control.

Let us take food as an example. Suppose that, after having spent one year in the ashram eating dry chappati, rice, dal, etc., you go out and see a nice, sumptuous meal. What do you do? You gorge yourself! The desire for such food has been there all the time, but it has been suppressed in the ashram. So you fill yourself, and after the stomach bloats you cry, “Oh, I feel so heavy, I feel sick, what should I do?” However, when you have control you eat with restraint according to the capacity of your stomach, being aware of

the desire which has been suppressed while you were in the ashram. If you are able to control it, then that desire governed by awareness does not create a problem. The desire has been there all the time; it has been building up all the while. In the first instance it overcame you, but in the second you were aware and you let go of it in a controlled way. Awareness makes all the difference between suppression and control.

Desires are always for some kind of self-satisfaction. Even when our desire is for our own development, it is selfish. If we desire to help others it is still selfish. To desire realization is selfish too. Desires can never be neutral or transcendental. Our prayers to God are similarly selfish. Only the object of desire has changed from money to realization, from wealth and prosperity to serving others. The attitude has changed but the desire is still there and desire is selfish.

The changing of our attitude and perception is necessary, but this can only happen when we are not sunk in ignorance. The realization must come that we need to change our attitude. Instead of doing something for our fulfilment, we need to do something to help others. It is the attitude of the ego which has to change.

The first step in this effort to understand the mental processes is self-analysis through the techniques of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Once we are able to understand what kind of thoughts, emotions, desires and experiences occur within us, we can slowly change our attitudes. Suppression will become control. Once you have that control, you will also gain the ability to allow everything that is bottled up, emotions, feelings, ambitions, desires and so forth, to come out in a systematic and controlled way.

What is consciousness in simple, layman's words?

When you look in the mirror, how do you see yourself? The other way round, right? You see your right side as left and your left side as right. When you look in a crystal ball how do you see yourself? Upside down, right? Totally reversed.

When you can perceive yourself just as yourself, that is consciousness.

When consciousness looks in the mirror and sees the reflection the other way round, it is known as mind. When consciousness looks in the crystal ball and sees itself upside down, it is known as ego or *ahamkara*. When you look at yourself as you are, then that is consciousness.

How can yoga practices help in the twentieth century?

I suggest that we first find out what our needs are. What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses? What are our ambitions? After discovering your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, which is the SWAN theory: strength=S, weakness=W, ambition=A, need=N, try to use the practices which can help you develop your strength, overcome your weakness and clear your mind so that you have a better direction in life. Use practices which will help you fulfil the immediate needs of the body and personality. This might be a combination of just a few asana and a few pranayama, or it might be a combination of ten atomic yogic bombs. You know, it all depends on an individual and on their SWAN.

What is the role of emotions in kriya yoga?

When we begin kriya yoga the practices are purely physical in nature; "Feel the breath flowing in that direction . . . develop a sensation of either heat or cold . . ." it is purely a physiological and imaginative process, as in practice number one, vipareet karani mudra. It is physical; watching the breath and injecting the energy. Awareness is injected from vishuddhi to ajna and from manipura to vishuddhi.

As long as we perform the physical and subtle imaginative practices in the kriyas, the emotions are not involved. They become very objective practices. However, when the pranas begin to move due to the effort of concentration, due to the direction that we are creating for their movement, and when the chakras are begin to awaken, then the emotions can really play havoc.

There was a person here in the ashram for about one year who used to practice the kriyas. While practising she used to cry. She would hear voices in her head telling her to do something. It was as if she was going crazy. She used to get very nervous, easily irritated, and was very sensitive to anything. If you happened to be in a bad mood and you looked at her she would think that you were angry with her. Internally she was extremely sensitive.

The first thing I did was to tell her not to practise the kriyas, because she was practising only the kriyas and neglecting the practices of asana and pranayama. So, the psychic energy that was being built up within her had no outlet, and she became so sensitive due to that build up of energy that she started feeling depressed, angry and easily irritated.

After a couple of months of not practising the kriyas but just involving herself in external work, she started to gain more control over her thoughts which previously used to flash across her mind at an incredible speed. She became more observant to her own emotional expressions and had better control over her irritation, anger, depression and frustration. Then I told her to practise asanas, pranayamas and just one of the kriyas for a week, and to spread the kriya practices over a period of twenty weeks. She started doing that and felt much better, more in control of herself.

The example of that lady led me to consider the role that emotions can play, especially when they are bubbling up uncontrollably from inside. If something happens externally we can think about it, we can rationalize it. If I get angry I can think about it. Why did I get angry? Maybe it is only two hours later but I can rationalize and think, "Oh, I was right, he was wrong, so I became angry", or "I was wrong, he was right, I should not have reacted." Some kind of understanding can be reached. However, when something is happening from deep inside in a meditative state how will I rationalize that? How will I try to compromise with that experience? I cannot.

Instead of being involved and being led away by the current of your emotions, try to develop the aspect of yourself which is standing back and watching the emotions. You are witnessing your actions, you are undergoing that process, and when you see that little part of yourself, you can find out where you have made a mistake and immediately correct it. You can try this with the practice of *antar mouna*.

Antar mouna is the practice of self-observation. Just as you watch your thoughts and create thoughts, in the same way, you have to train yourself to observe the emotions; create an emotion, stop it, bring up another one, change it, etc. That attitude of the seer, the witness, combined with *asana*, *pranayama* and the *kriyas*, will help with emotional control.

Can you explain mantra and mantra diksha?

Mantras are sound vibrations which influence the personality. Sounds work on many different levels of the personality. There are sounds which we hear through our ears, and which affect the condition of our nervous system, brain, emotions and intellect. For example, some forms of music influence our personality; they can either excite or relax it. Then there are some forms of sound which are beyond the normal human range but which still affect and alter our state of mind and being. Mantras are actually these types of sounds. They are not always inaudible, but their effect on the personality is very subtle.

Every type of personality has a particular set of vibrations, a particular set of mantras according to its state of being. When we know which particular mantra belongs to our personality type, in order that we may overcome our limitations and develop the qualities of body, mind and spirit, we are able to re-balance our mental structure by repeating it.

The literal meaning of *mantra* is a method through which we can liberate the mind. Mantras have always been associated with a set of sound vibrations, and these sound vibrations are in turn associated with the *chakras*, the pranic

centres within the body. In many people some pranic centres are more active than others, and their awakening varies from individual to individual. By repetition of a mantra people who are highly sensitive and emotional can balance this sensitive aspect of their personality and transcend it, so that the negativity which they experience by becoming over-sensitive and emotional does not affect them.

Everything in life ultimately boils down to the process of giving and receiving. We receive many things from other people, and from the environment, and we give many things to other people and also to the environment. We project. Since our minds are extroverted we are fully involved in this projection and what we give out is not balanced. In a dissipated state of mind we give out dissipated energy; in a negative state of mind we give out negative energy; in a dissipated state of emotion, when we are undergoing some traumatic experience of fear, anxiety, anger or frustration, we give that out also, we project it. This is because we are moving in the external direction.

Mantra balances this giving and receiving aspect, by balancing the mental, emotional, and intellectual structure, so that even if we receive some negativity from other people it will not harm us, it will not harm our sensitivity and receptivity or our ability to perform any action. Then when we project, it will be a balanced projection, not a negative or traumatic one.

This is the main benefit of mantra, trying to stabilize, harmonize, and balance the personality: the emotional personality, the intellectual personality, the dynamic personality or the psychic personality, the four types of personality as defined in modern psychology. These four personality types undergo different experiences. The mantra, the sound, the vibration that belongs to a particular type of personality helps to re-balance or restructure the big fluctuations, so that there are no ups and downs, but rather, the experience of a continuous state of mind, being and action.

Mantra initiation or diksha is a process; it is not something deep, mysterious and vague. The mantra is given according to the type of personality you have, your astrological sun sign, your need or requirement. It is an intuitive process for whoever gives it, not an intellectual one. After you have the mantra it becomes a part of your life. Any time of the day, in order to centre the attention, the mind, and consciousness, in order to experience awareness, one can constantly repeat the mantra mentally.

When we go out on a sunny day and there is a lot of glare, we put on sunglasses which cut out that glare and enable us to see better, without causing any strain to the eyes. The mantra works in a similar manner. It enables us to go out in the world, and at the same time, cut out its glare so that we are able to see better, without causing any strain to the eyes of the mind.

Sannyasins wear rudraksha malas most of the time and some wear crystal as well as tulsi malas along with rudraksha malas. Is wearing these malas a necessity for them and their sadhana, and what is the difference between a mala available in the market and a mala given by a sadguru?

There are many different forms of sannyasa, many different groups and traditions. Traditionally, sannyasins or renunciates wear the rudraksha mala. Vaishnavites wear the tulsi mala, Shaivites wear rudraksha malas and there are many other categories. In general, sannyasins wear the rudraksha mala and after they have attained the top seat they can wear anything they like, because for them the symbolic meaning of the dress, mala and shaved head does not really mean anything, they have developed that form of awareness where everything is equal.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for example, was one of the greatest masters of the present age, a realized person who saw no distinction between 'good' and 'bad'. He had the capacity to eat human excrement and good food, both

at the same time, and he did it many times, on many occasions. There are examples of many other men who have been able to attain this type of consciousness. We may not be able to accept it today because we have the concept of 'right' and 'wrong' but for those people who have gone beyond this concept and who have been able to experience divinity and the true reality, what is right and wrong for them? There are many things which we can accept and many things which we cannot. For example, for an Indian to go to the West and eat with his fingers is considered bad manners, but to eat with the fingers here is common, so what is 'good' and what is 'bad'? It all depends on the tradition, country, and so on.

The hero or idol for sannyasins is Lord Shiva, a renunciate who is depicted as a person smeared with ashes, with serpents around his neck, arms and body, and a tiger skin for clothes, wearing a rudraksha mala and doing japa with a rudraksha mala. Sannyasins follow in his footsteps by wearing rudraksha malas and there are many traditions of sannyasa in which people follow him literally. They smear their body with ashes, let their hair grow, wear no clothes, play with fire, and serpents, but you will have to study the different traditions in order to understand this.

In this ashram life, we belong to the order of Saraswati. There are ten different orders created by Adi Shankaracharya, and Saraswati is one of them. According to tradition we are supposed to wear the rudraksha mala. It is given to us at the time of initiation and we are supposed to do japa according to the instruction of the guru.

There is little difference between a mala which has been given to you by a sadguru or guru and the mala which you get in the market. The difference is that the mala given to you by your guru is given to you for a specific sadhana and it is charged with the energy of the guru. Therefore, we recommend people who do sadhana to get their mala from their guru. In general, there are many rules for malas. If you want to know about it in detail read the book *Mantra*

Mahodadhi or *Japa Yoga*. There are many books written on the subject, and you will be able to get a clear picture from them.

Is it beneficial to combine yogic sadhana with New Age therapies like re-birthing? Re-birthing is a breathing practice in which one can re-experience one's birth and resolve any conflicts that started at that time.

Most of the modern alternative techniques and therapies have utilized, in one way or another, some yogic practices or practices similar to the ones which we find in yoga. If one has a good and clear understanding of yogic principles and practices, then other practices are not necessary.

Re-birthing is simply an extension of bhastrika pranayama, rapid breathing and hyperventilation of the brain, which leads to different kinds of hallucinations and the surfacing of psychological experiences from early childhood. Different therapists have combined other techniques with this practice, such as autosuggestion, relaxation and self-analysis. I think it should be up to the therapist to decide how to deal with the experiences that emerge from within, through these or other suitable methods.

To deal with any mental or psychological manifestations that may arise, we can utilize the principles of pratyahara and dharana. Then the other therapies actually have no place, when compared with yogic therapy. Every therapy is valid. It is not our purpose to denounce or criticize or extol any form of therapy. Rather, we should have a proper understanding of what each therapy can do for us, and what kind of changes it can produce within us.

Ultimately, we have to realize the natural principles governing the body, mind and spirit and live according to these principles. This realization is better than following any kind of therapy, including yoga. Once we are aware of the principles which govern our life, the natural laws which control, direct and motivate our life, body, emotions, mind and the deep-rooted impressions within the psyche, then we can find health and contentment.

After thousands of years of practice of religion, why does poverty still exist?

Poverty and religion have nothing to do with each other. Religion is a concept in which we try to spiritualize our outlook. We try to experience divinity in our lifestyle. We try to make our feelings sublime, transcendental, positive through prayer, meditation, and the like. Poverty is a different thing altogether.

Of course, religion has mentioned ways to overcome poverty, but we do not understand them. “Just have what you require as your basic needs.” How many people follow that mandate? This is known in yoga as *aparigraha*, stop accumulating. It is one of the yogic mandates. We have one car, you have three cars. We have one bicycle, you have ten bicycles. We continually accumulate.

If we were to follow all the precepts of religion then there would not be any problem, either socially or otherwise. However, we believe religion to be a practice that links us with God, who is unapproachable, an entity that we are unable to understand with our limited mind. We simply follow a tradition because everybody is following it. This lack of understanding of the precepts, of the codes of conduct, becomes the ultimate cause of our ignorance and suffering.

Every religion has its code of conduct, its disciplines that one can follow in order to improve one's life, but because of our misunderstanding of these concepts we are unable to incorporate them into the normal day to day framework of our lives, and thus religion simply becomes *karma kanda* or ritual, and not *jnana kanda*, understanding. Karma kanda means the ceremonial aspect: every Sunday we go to church, every Monday we go to the Shiva temple and ring the bell, the louder we ring the bell the better the deity will be pleased; or every Sunday we perform a fire ceremony and throw some rice, or dal and subji to feed the fire god. It has all become very ritualistic and it is the ritual which has become the religion.

However, the word 'religion' does not mean external ritual. Religion is a Latin word which means the same as yoga: to unite, to join, to fuse, to merge. The mistake lies within our understanding and application of these precepts in society and life in general. If we can improve our understanding of them, I am sure we can go a long way in dealing with such social problems as poverty, violence, crime, etc.

What is the need for yoga in daily life?

You should ask yourself that. You came to yoga and you adopted yoga because of your need, not because I stuffed it down your gullet! Everybody has their own nature, personality-type, desires and ambitions which need to be fulfilled.

People come to yoga for different reasons. Some come for physiological reasons; they believe yoga to be a preventive method for physiological ailments, diseases and imbalances. Some believe that yoga is a form of therapy just like homeopathy, naturopathy, ayurveda and allopathy; *yogopathy* has also sprung up. Others come because they want to learn how to relax and handle the stress and tension of daily life. Still others come to yoga because they want to develop their mental faculties and their psychic qualities.

We all agree that we need to harmonize or bring about a balance in our lifestyle. Our lifestyle includes everything from the time we wake up in the morning to the time we go to bed at night. We think, we drink, we eat, we talk, we communicate, we utilize different physiological and psychological faculties, and it is for developing an awareness of these faculties that we have within us that we require yoga.

Once we begin to practise yoga, we achieve balance in the physiological and psychological structure and harmony in the psychic personality, which helps us to evolve mentally, intellectually and psychically.

What does renunciation mean and what is its value in daily life?

If you take an earthen pot and submerge it in water, what do you find? There is water inside and there is water outside. Is the water inside the pot different to the water around the pot? No, it is not. The only difference is that there is a shape or form holding some of the water inside and not allowing it to mix with the water outside. We are the same as the pot. We are all little pots in an ocean of energy and consciousness. What do we have to renounce if we want to mix the contained water with the free-flowing water, the individual energy with the cosmic energy? We break the pot. This breaking of identity is the renunciation of ego, which unlocks the final door, thus allowing for the unity of atman with Brahman.

Different types of renunciation take place at different stages of life. However, in order to renounce something that is a very deep and intimate part of our being, we need to have a different form of consciousness.

Somebody in Los Angeles once asked Sri Swamiji if it is possible to achieve God-realization in this lifetime, and he answered, "No!" It was a big shock for everyone present, and we thought, "Are we simply wasting our time? What are we doing?" He continued by saying that the experience of God is the experience of a transcendental reality, and in order to have that transcendental experience it is necessary to have a transcendental mind. If we own a transcendental mind, then we can own God too, but until then we need to work, and renounce our non-transcendental being. This is the highest form of renunciation; renouncing life. People do it anyway at the end of their lifetime. Many people also renounce the family, but not the limited personality.

Actual renunciation is only related with spiritual life. It does not reflect on our day to day life. What can we renounce in our day to day life, our habits? We can try. What we could renounce in our day to day life are our negative feelings and emotions. However, if we try to renounce these little daily items, we will find that we have to fill in the gap with

something else. Therefore, on one hand we are renouncing, and on the other hand we are accumulating. In yoga philosophy we say, first find out where the mistakes are being made. Change something and do not make the same mistake again. Improve yourself, and then once you have improved, hopefully you will keep on improving.

Many people consider yoga asana to be a system for physical fitness only. Can you comment?

If you take up yoga asana, for whatever reason, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual, you have to follow a system. This allows you to develop a harmonious and well-balanced physiological and psychological structure. If you take up yoga for physical problems, there is no doubt that it will be able to help you, but at the same time it influences the various facets of your personality, i.e. mind, emotions, behaviour, feeling, etc. So, asana can never be described as affecting only the physical body. Their influence is very far-reaching and not just confined to the physiological structure.

Pranayama, the physical practice of breathing, affects the mind, emotions and intellect. The practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana do not only affect the mind, but also the body, because the mind and body are integrated realities. You cannot separate the body from the mind or the mind from the body. If you separate these two from each other, then you cease to exist. Therefore, total development of the human personality is the aim of yoga, including asana.

Can you define sadhana?

The general concept of sadhana is that one practises something for an extended period of time in order to achieve a particular end or goal. There are many types of sadhana. In the Indian tradition three types of sadhana are recognised. The first is vedic sadhana, the second is yogic sadhana and the third is tantric sadhana.

Every one of us has a desire to attain perfection, peace of mind and mental clarity, and to develop the faculties

of mind and consciousness. In order to achieve this, we examine various practices as presented by different religions, philosophies, and schools of thought, and selecting what is most suited to our temperament, we pursue one path, which can lead us towards enlightenment, or self-realization.

Sadhana actually means progressing towards perfection. It is the process we adopt for the expansion and liberation of consciousness and energy. It is an evolutionary process, because the human consciousness is always evolving. We are different today from what we were a few generations ago, and we will be different in future from what we are today. This is an accepted fact. The theory of evolution does not only limit itself to the material world, but also to man's inner structure, mind and personality, and the structure of his consciousness and energy. Any type of method may be adopted by us in order that we may have this evolutionary experience, and the method we adopt is termed *sadhana*.

Now we come to the various forms of *sadhana*. First, *vedic sadhana*. Vedic *sadhana* involves *upasana* or worship, *karma kanda* or ritual, and *aradhana* or invocation, the worship of deities and the offering of flowers. In order to tune the mind to the object of our choice and reverence, the concept of various gods and goddesses plays an important role.

Second, we have the many forms of *yogic sadhana* involving the practices of *dhyana yoga*, the yoga of meditation; *japa yoga*, the yoga of the repetition of mantra; *raja yoga*, the 8-fold path; *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion; *karma yoga*, the yoga of action and other forms such as *kriya yoga*, *kundalini yoga*, *laya yoga*, *nada yoga*, and so on. All these forms of *yogic sadhana* tune the mind, making it receptive for the experience of an internal awakening or energy of *Shakti*.

Third comes *tantric sadhana*, of which there are many forms. The commonly known forms of *tantric sadhana* often very misunderstood. We tend to consider *tantra* as some irrelevant or forbidden subject, but it is in fact one of the most powerful practices ever devised for achieving perfection and enlightenment. There are many forms of

tantric sadhana, which are divided into two paths: *vama marga* or the left-hand path, and *dakshina marga* or the right-hand path. Even in these two divisions there are different classifications. These three sadhanas deal with different types of meditation and practices to awaken the dormant energy centres within the human personality and are the types of sadhana common today.

Do you need to have a special lifestyle to practise kriya yoga?

The urge to change one's lifestyle will come spontaneously. Although yoga is considered to be a form of discipline, it is not enforced discipline. Gradually, with yoga practices we find that as our consciousness undergoes a transformation, our habits, lifestyle, and desires automatically undergo a change. If you force people to quit the habit of smoking, the desire will still be there: "Oh, let me have one more!" but if the desire to quit the habit and the inclination or craving is no longer there, they will not miss cigarettes at all.

The same principle applies to the practices of yoga. Lead your life as you wish and as you are used to. It is not necessary to become sattwic immediately. Let the tamasic tendency continue for another ten years. If you are sincere and regular with the practices, then gradually they will change your pranic and mental structure, and that change which comes about naturally will be more effective, than one which has been enforced. So, the main thing is regularity of sadhana. Keep your sight firmly fixed on the goal that you have set in front of you, and in the course of time your life will adjust positively.

What are chakras and how do they affect the body and mind?

The literal meaning of the word *chakra* is 'wheel'. Chakras represent centres of energy which are locked in different parts of the body. The three bodies, the gross, subtle and causal, are experienced through five different expressions known as koshas. *Annamaya kosha* is the experience and expression of matter, *pranamaya kosha* of the energy field, *manomaya*

kosha of the mind, *vijnanamaya kosha* of the intellect, and *anandamaya kosha* of the balanced homogeneous aspect of our inner spirit, the blissful state. These five experiences are an integrated part of the three bodies.

The chakras are located in the subtle body, influencing both the physical and causal bodies. The energy which is locked in each chakra represents a manifestation of unmanifest energy. When something unmanifest has to manifest itself it undergoes a process of transformation, and each transformation is known as a chakra.

The chakras are also related to the five elements. *Mooladhara* is the experience of matter or the earth element, *swadhisthana* is the experience of the water element, *manipura* of the element of fire, *anahata* of air, and *vishuddhi* of ether. *Ajna* is the experience of mind, and *sahasrara* is the experience of the unmanifest. Each chakra represents an element, a manifestation of energy at different stages. Releasing energy blocks in the chakra leads to altered states of mind and consciousness, control over certain physiological and psychological expressions, and the awakening of the dormant centres of the brain and deeper mind.

Sri Swamiji explains it very nicely. He says that the brain is like an uninhabited city which is completely ready in every respect but has not yet been supplied with electricity. Therefore, there is no light. Habitation will take place, or light will come, only after the different brain centres have been awakened or the power supply has been turned on. At the moment, according to science, we utilize only ten percent of our total brain faculties. We are aware only of the conscious area of the mind and not so much of the subconscious and unconscious areas. Stimulation and awakening of the remaining ninety percent of the brain, and total understanding of the deeper mind in terms of the subconscious and unconscious, represents the awakening of the chakras. A superhuman nature, which can be developed through sadhana, designed to awaken the chakras and kundalini, is the final aim of yoga.

The whole concept of the chakras and kundalini is defined clearly in the tantras. You will also find it explained in terms of our day-to-day life and experiences in the book, *Kundalini Tantra*. It is one of the most comprehensive books regarding chakras.

The energy in the chakras is called prana. Pranic energy has not yet been defined or understood, but it has been found that even when the body is deemed to be clinically dead, as long as the pranas are active, the body will not decay. There have been many experiments in different parts of the world showing that the body does not decay in deep states of samadhi. What preserves the body in such states when the heart has stopped beating, blood pressure is nil, no food is taken, and the body's metabolic activity has stopped? When they come out from the state of samadhi, the body begins to function normally. The pranas have preserved it, but so far no instruments have been able to monitor the pranas.

There is an example of Sri Swamiji's guru-brother, Swami Nadabrahmananda Saraswati. He is now quite aged, but he is still a master musician. An experiment was conducted in the US to verify his claim that he could hold his breath for an hour without any difficulty. He was put in an airtight glass chamber. In two other similar chambers, a lit candle and a live monkey were placed. Electrodes were connected to his heart, brain and different parts of his body, and he was asked to play the tabla while the scientists monitored him from outside. They also blocked his nose and ears, and his whole body was smeared with wax, because they thought that he might be able to breathe through his pores.

After three minutes the candles went out, and the monkey fell down unconscious after fifteen minutes, but Swami Nadabrahmananda continued to play his tabla for more than forty minutes. Although not breathing he was sweating, and a coin placed on his shaved head by the researcher was jumping up and down. When they put a microphone to any part of his body a loud, constant sound like that of a

waterfall was heard. He explained that it was the sound of the movement of prana, adding that one will continue to live as long as the pranas are active, even if one stops breathing.

This pranic energy is contained in the chakras in different forms and manifestations. Awakening of the psychic centres is not the only aspect of kundalini yoga, it also involves the awakening of prana shakti, the pranic energy. When combined, these two lead to the final transformation of human consciousness and mind.

What is the difference between vedic and tantric mantras?

Mantras are a force, an energy which can liberate the mind from its bondage. That is the definition of the word mantra: *Mananat trayate iti mantraha*. The sound or power which can liberate the mind is known as mantra whether it is tantric or vedic, or any other type of mantra from different cultures, religions and systems of philosophy. We have yogic mantras too. Mantras work on the psyche. The continuous sound vibration of mantra repetition will alter either the physiological or psychological structure. How can a sound vibration alter the physiological structure?

When an army is marching, and it comes to a wooden bridge, it has to break step. It is the general practice in the army never to march across a bridge, as the vibrations produced at the time of marching will eventually make the bridge fall down.

A sound vibration has a form and a specific shape, as is now being recognized by physics. Sounds form different patterns, different waves; they have different frequencies and these frequencies, waves and patterns correspond with particular mantras.

There are some mantras which are slow to act and some which are very fast-acting. Tantric mantras are fast-acting mantras, because immediately upon using the mantra we find some type of energy centre within us opening up. We have different types of experiences. We feel different at the time of the repetition of a tantric mantra. Vedic mantras,

on the other hand, are slow acting. Both types, however, act on the different tattwas within the body and on the different states of consciousness within the personality, but each mantra will give us an experience of a different dimension of awareness. For example, take the tantric mantra *Klim* and the vedic Gayatri mantra: *Om bhur bhuvah swaha tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*. One is a very long mantra and the other, the tantric one, is very short. Which mantra we use depends on the type of experiences we want to have or the practices which the sadhaka needs in order to develop the quality of his mind and consciousness.

The guru gives a mantra according to what our personality requires, whether tantric or vedic. Mantras are not given according to superficial requirements; it is more of an intuitive process which the guru utilizes to know the innermost need of the practitioner or sadhaka.

Each mantra is related with a tattwa or element within the body, has a relationship with a state of mind and an altered state of consciousness, and deals separately with the experience that it brings to the surface of the mind. It gives us a different vision; we will see a specific colour and a definite shape.

You may not be aware of this when you are repeating your mantra, but some types of symbols automatically come to the mind during repetition. Some colours superimpose themselves on the mind, and some tattwa of the body awakens automatically. You undergo a process of purification when you repeat a mantra, and this is common to every mantra, whether it is tantric or vedic.

Vedic mantras are very precise. They have a ritual behind them. In order to repeat a vedic mantra you have to follow the system of karma kanda, which is not necessary with the tantric mantras. When you are practising high tantric sadhana then, of course, there are rituals within the tantric tradition also; you may even have to sit on top of a corpse and repeat *Klim* one million times. That is a different matter

altogether. You might have to go to the graveyard and do many other things too, but a spiritual aspirant or a yogic sadhaka does not have to worry about the ritual aspects of the mantra. Vedanta has a ritual, tantra has a ritual and these rituals fulfil different aims.

When we have a friend dying of cancer or some other disease, is there anything we can do to help them in the transition from this life to the next?

Send them some good vibrations all the way through. In order to transmit your energy to the person who is suffering, the first requirement is that you should have a tranquil and well-balanced mind. If you yourself are worrying about someone, psychically you may be suffering more than them and you cannot transmit positive energy. You may practise any type of meditation, or healing, but to no avail. If you want to help a person who is sick or nearly dying, the first requirement is to keep yourself peaceful, have a clear mind, build up your own energy and learn to transmit that energy for their wellbeing, either in this life or in the afterlife.

There are many different forms of meditation. If you get the opportunity to study the tantra shastras, you will find certain meditation techniques for death and dying which have been very superficially brought to light by different researchers and teachers. They are becoming quite popular in western countries. However, they are practised on a very superficial level. The practices of meditation which help the sick to either get well or have a peaceful journey are very powerful and build up a lot of energy within the personality, within the body, thoughts, feelings, projection and expression.

One thing you must keep in mind is that you have to be able to handle the force of the prana which you awaken at the time of meditation and develop the ability to transmit it to the other person. You must have the ability to direct the force of energy within yourself. Preparation for this type of meditation technique is very important and you should go

through the process of *pratyahara* and *dharana* – introversion of the senses and concentration of mind. When you have perfected the states of *pratyahara* and *dharana*, then you should learn a simple technique of thought-transmission for the health and wellbeing of any person, not necessarily just for one who is sick. Once you have this ability to transmit your thought or energy, practise the meditation for death and dying, which will in many cases cure the person who is sick. There is no doubt about it; through willpower, psychic healing can occur.

One of the practices of psychic healing is the practice of *prana vidya*. The awakening of *prana* within the body and the transmission of that *prana* for health can occur, and if there is no chance for the other person's improvement, still you can make sure that his evolution of consciousness will continue even at the time of suffering and that there will be no regression. You can definitely ensure that much. If you are able to ensure that much then you can be confident that the person will have a better life next time. Naturally, it will require a lot of practice, and not everybody is qualified. We may sit down, try it out and feel good, but not have the natural ability. It is developing that natural ability or instinct which is necessary if you want to help other people. Therefore, go through the practices of *pratyahara* and *dharana* and try to develop this natural ability to help others.

Is there anything yoga can do to ease the conflict between traditional and modern views?

Society everywhere is undergoing a great change, and so are many of the traditional values in India, and there is great conflict. However, one thing is certain, that we will be able to achieve a point of balance, not necessarily with yoga alone, but by using any form of meditation in which we can observe ourselves and what we are experiencing. We can then judge our own values and try to find the middle point between being completely traditional or completely radical.

Once we are able to achieve this central point, I am sure there will be a very beautiful blend of the traditional with the modern. This applies to any and every society where people are experiencing a change in values, tradition and lifestyle, and are not able to come to terms with the family and social tradition, or with the influx of the new traditions. Therefore, meditation in general is very useful in bringing one to the middle rather than to an extreme path.

We have been told not to cultivate expectations, but are they not necessary in order to develop virtues we wish to acquire?

I am sure expectations have a large role to play in the development of virtue, but the incorporation of a quality or virtue into our life is not so simple that we can rationalize it. When we try to develop a particular quality there is always a struggle. Our existing state of mind tends to superimpose itself on the quality or virtues desired.

Ultimately, all virtue and vice is within us. There is nothing to learn, it is just a matter of our computer acknowledging that particular field and accepting it. When there is no acknowledgement, there is distraction and dissipation; when there is acknowledgement and acceptance, then the mind is centred and one-pointed.

If you are meditating and somebody disturbs you to tell you to go and sweep the kitchen floor, there is bound to be a reaction, because you consider meditation as something constructive while sweeping the floor is not. However, if you are able to analyze that state of reaction, and realize that even while sweeping the floor you can practise meditation, then you will be doing something positive. By overcoming this negative reaction which is due to conditioning, and accepting the situation with a different frame of mind, you will be able to flow with the current of whatever is happening, and thus create a deeper meditative state.

We come to the Bihar School of Yoga for TTC, YTC and kriya yoga, and by the time we finish the courses we love

the ashram way of life. Can we come to the ashram every now and then and stay for a few days? Please clarify the procedure.

One should make a rule for oneself to visit the ashram at least once every year. Ashrams are the spiritual homes of people and they are places where many people gather and try to walk the same path; their goal is the same, their desires are the same, their way of life is the same. If you can make it a discipline to visit an ashram at least once every year, not necessarily for a course, but just for a few days in order to re-charge yourself, your mental, emotional and psychic personality, you will be greatly benefited.

Please tell us the difference between mahatma, yogi, muni and sannyasin.

There is no difference. There are many different beliefs and there have been many traditions which have given different names according to the various qualities and attainments of the spiritual seeker. According to these beliefs and traditions a sannyasin can also be known as mahatma, swami or yogi. One cannot really say that a yogi is this; a mahatma is that, a muni is this or a sannyasin is that.

If by chance somebody calls Sri Swamiji 'Mahatma', he will be known as a mahatma. If they call him 'Swami', he will be known as a swami. If by chance somebody calls him 'Pope' then he will be known as a pope. Names do not matter; it is the spirit that is being conveyed by a spiritual seeker that is important. The goal is one, the quest for Truth. According to different traditions, beliefs and religions, different names are given, but the main idea is basically the same in all of them.

Are there any yogic practices that help with impotence?

There are certain practices of asana and pranayama, and practices of hatha yoga which can help resolve problems like impotence. If you have this problem then consult your yoga teacher, he will be able to direct you.

Are there any meditation techniques for children to enhance the creative aspect of their personality?

Recently, I was reading a report from the University of Massachusetts which compared the creativity of a child to that of a grown-up. It is said grown-ups use only two percent of their creative nature, whereas a child around the age of five utilizes eight percent of this same quality. Why the difference? As adults, we are already set in our thinking, in our expression, in our understanding, and interaction with others whereas a child of five is only learning how to develop and understand it. Therefore, a child utilizes more of the creative nature than a grown-up. This eight percent increases and becomes twelve percent between the age of five and fifteen. The system of biofeedback, if utilized on students between the age of five and fifteen, will enhance the creative aspect of mind.

After reading this, I discussed it with Sri Swamiji and he also said that meditation, if it were taught to children, would give them a better ability to utilize their inner qualities and faculties, more than grown-ups utilize, because they would become more in tune with their feelings and experiences, and with what they want to become or achieve.

There are two processes: one is being what we are, and one is becoming what we wish to be. Grown-ups fall into the first category of 'being', because of their set pattern of life. They have already become what they want to become. If they want to change from that regular lifestyle, it is difficult. However, if the child who is 'becoming', develops from the very beginning the ability to move from one area of experience, thought and expression into another area of experience, thought and action, he will have great flexibility in adapting to any changing circumstance, and he will be much more content in every situation.

Yantra meditation is a very special meditation for children. Grown-ups do abstract meditation like *antar mouna*, sitting down and observing the thoughts, or *ajapa japa*, mantra repetition, *chidakasha dharana*, visualization, *prana*

vidya, awakening of prana, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, but for a child, the only form of meditation suitable and effective for development is yantra meditation or yantra prakasha. Place a yantra or mandala in front of the child and tell him to concentrate in the centre. It is the same process as *trataka*. He should try to retain the image for as long as possible, and he should only do it once, whether it takes five minutes or ten. That visual meditation will definitely enhance the creative aspect of his personality.

Some of us have trouble getting in touch with the inner voice. Please explain about the inner voice and how to get in touch with it.

I think everybody has trouble listening to their inner voice, and we have to make a decision as to whether we can hear it or not. In yoga, there are two aspects. One is of conscience. Everybody has their conscience which tells them what is right and what is wrong. Many times this subtle part of our personality talks to our gross nature. However, there is another aspect which is even more subtle, and in order to understand it we first have to understand the chakras. Each chakra represents a state of consciousness, a stage of energy. As we evolve, and these psychic centres are awakened, we begin to experience many things. We begin to see and hear things. We can say that our internal senses are awakened.

Just as we have external sensory experiences, in the same way we have internal sensory experiences. Therefore, at the time of meditation we often hear sounds which are not supposed to exist in the external environment. We see visions which seem real and are like nightmares. A nightmare is a gross experience and a vision is a subtle experience. Many times in meditation, we smell things which are not in the external environment. Our internal senses become very sharp, very acute. This is the state of *pratyahara* and *dharana*. As we go deep into ourselves and gather the faculties of mind, the dissipated energies of mind and the senses are internalized; the external consciousness becomes

aware of the internal environment. Those experiences just come and then after some time, they dissipate.

There comes a time when we transcend the experience of mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi and come to ajna. What does it mean? When we have transcended the experiences related to the elements earth, water, fire, air and ether, we have gone beyond the gross nature of the body. We have gone beyond the senses. Then, at ajna chakra, which is the seat of the subtle mind, the seat of consciousness, we experience voices, directions, and guidance, and that becomes the true inner voice for us, because by this time we have shed the experiences of the external body, we have established ourselves in the experiences of inner self-consciousness. Therefore, we say in yoga that *guru tattwa*, which is not the physical guru but the energy that is inside, gives us a direction, once we are able to raise the level of consciousness up to ajna chakra.

Not many people go beyond their mooladhara or swadhisthana chakras, and if they hear things while remaining at this level, it is just external experience. The actual experience of 'the Divine Voice', 'God's directions', 'guru's guidance', 'the Voice' or 'the directions of the Self' is heard at ajna chakra, and that requires a lot of preparation.

In *Early Teachings of Swami Satyananda*, Sri Swamiji talks about vajroli mudra or certain kriyas where the physical nerve connection is completely disconnected and the sex glands become inactive. Could you enlighten us on this?

Mudras and bandhas both work on the same principles as those of acupuncture. By performing certain mudras or physical locks, we are able to channel or control the flow of pranic energy entering into or emerging from the body. Practices such as vajroli mudra, ashwini mudra and moola-bandha are meant to block the downward flow of energy. If you are aware of the five pranas or their manifestation in the body you will know that the apanic force, situated between the perineum and the navel, is a downward moving force

controlling mooladhara and swadhisthana chakra. This means that control of the unconscious activities, the deep-rooted samskaras and inhibitions, desires, sense of security and sexual urge are being controlled by the apanic force.

In karma yoga or kundalini yoga, what do we try to do? First, we try to reverse the flow of apana. We try to make apana move up, and when it begins to flow upwards then it is considered that the natural tendencies of mooladhara and swadhisthana are under control. They have been transcended, purified and brought under the observation of consciousness. Right now our samskaras, desires, karmas, likes and dislikes are not under the observation of consciousness.

In yoga it is believed that in the region of the perineum there are many nerve endings and a main nadi, known as the *vajra nadi*, which corresponds to the sciatic nerve. There is another nadi, *brahma nadi*, which runs through the centre of sushumna. These nerves are specifically stimulated or acted upon when we practise vajroli or ashwini mudra. We already know about the function of the three main nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna and, of course, these are the three important ones in yoga. Brahma represents the creative aspect, the sexual urge, desire. With the practice of vajroli and ashwini mudras, the flow of apana within brahma nadi is reversed, and all the psychological, physical, mental and emotional desires are transcended. Apana is reversed, and begins to move in brahma nadi in the other direction.

Then comes vajra nadi. Of course, physically we relate vajra nadi to the sciatic nerve, as it is located in approximately the same region. It is affected by the practice of vajrasana, and vajrasana is considered to be an effective posture for the maintenance of celibacy. When this particular nadi is pressed every type of physical sexual stimulation or urge is eliminated. Vajra nadi runs up the legs and meets in the centre of the perineum, right at the region of mooladhara chakra. Therefore, when we say that moolabandha is practised to stimulate and alter the activity

of mooladhara chakra, what we are saying is that in order to influence and alter the activity of mooladhara chakra, which represents the sexual urge, *kama* or desire, the sense of security on the monetary, emotional and family levels are transformed into spiritual energy.

Spiritual energy is, of course, an activity of the mind, just as desire is an activity of the mind as much as it is physical. The sexual urge is an activity of both the mind and the body. The sexual experience is as much an experience of the mind as it is physical. This is exactly what tantra says. In order to derive spiritual experience and knowledge from any kind of physical action, not necessarily sexual, there has to be a process of mental observation, the concept of *drashta*, the witness, and that is the reason why in tantra, so much emphasis has been put on having one part of the mind always observing what the rest of the mind is doing or thinking.

Swamiji, I have only a little faith in myself and in God. What can I do to make it stronger?

It is said that faith and belief are for a person who has had no experience, but for one who has had the spiritual experience, faith and belief are not important, because a realization has taken place. Frankly speaking, they are important only for the ignorant, while realization is for people who search.

When it comes to God, there are conflicting ideas. Every individual has their own understanding of God. If there is awareness that the energy of God is everywhere, and we are nothing but instruments which are being played by Him, then we can lay down our arms instead of battling against destiny and life and stop searching for God outside. How much control does one have over destiny or over life itself? We cannot stop ourselves from growing old; nor can we stop ourselves from eventually dying. We cannot stop ourselves from taking birth. These things are beyond any kind of human effort. A person who is born has to die, either today or after twenty years; death is certain. We are afraid of it but

it is an unchanging reality. Regarding destiny, we have no control over it, despite all the best efforts that we make to get out of any given situation.

What is it that pushes us into the kind of situation which we do not want to happen? First there must be a realization that everything contains within it, or is composed of, divine energy. Once that realization has dawned, there is no option but to follow the Divine Will: "Thy Will be done, not mine!"

In order to have this realization, the practice of jnana yoga is utilized. In the last stage of jnana yoga, the concept of vairagya and viveka has been defined; *vairagya* symbolising non-attachment, not detachment, and *viveka* symbolizing proper, just and right understanding, which leads to the experience of universal consciousness as being present in everything.

There has to be a belief that we are all right at the level we are at with our understanding, perception, knowledge and so forth; even if we are ignorant, even if we do not believe in anything, it is all right. We are being directed by something, by some force, by some energy which is not in our control. This much understanding is sufficient. When this understanding becomes clear, we begin to think about it: "What is it that is making me act, move, behave, think and talk?" Gradually a path will open up for the direct experience of that divine energy. Everyone has to find their own solution to this eternal problem.

Bhakti yoga has only one philosophy for believers: fix your mind on the image you have taken as your symbol and merge with that, let the identification become so powerful that there is no turning back. For the other group of people who lack faith, who lack confidence, or who do not believe in God, bhakti yoga says that by channelling one's emotions into a sadhana and incorporating a mantra you will experience divinity, because an internal transformation takes place. So, if you believe, then have that image in front of you; if you do not, then practise mantra, because both roads lead to the same destination.

Could you explain karma sannyasa?

Sannyasa is a tradition for spiritually inclined people and it is based on the concept of proper understanding and detachment. Nowadays, we find different ideas in the sannyasa tradition. Some people consider it to be a system for recluses who leave society and live in solitude, and some consider it to be a tradition of yogis and swamis who have no worldly attachment. However, traditionally sannyasa was a system in which every participant was encouraged to develop his creative nature.

In the sannyasa tradition, which was reorganized and restructured by Adi Shankaracharya, it was understood that every individual had his karma, his obligations, duties to self, to society, and to the world in general. Fulfilling these obligations and responsibilities by using one's creative qualities is the purpose of sannyasa. Once we become aware of our spiritual inclination and obligation towards self, society and the world in general, we try to find a system which can bring about a balance in our life.

One of the biggest problems in life is attachment, which is even stronger than our negative emotions. Working through our attachments, in all their manifestations, and achieving the state of non-attachment is considered to be the prime factor in the life of a sannyasin. Non-attachment is different to detachment. Detachment can mean total separation at times, but in non-attachment it does not matter if you are attached or detached. Circumstances and life situations continue to be the same, but the mental acceptance and view of life changes. Non-attachment is known as *vairagya*, and detachment is known as *virakti*. Virakti means a total cut off from the senses of pleasure and *vairagya* means accepting the sensory pleasures while at the same time being above them.

How does non-attachment develop? How do we gain an understanding of what is right and what is wrong? This happens through the proper use of the intellect and the mind, and a proper understanding of the different

expressions of life. Proper understanding is known as *viveka*, and *vairagya* and *viveka* are the two concepts of *sannyasa* which allow our creative energy to manifest.

According to tradition, *sannyasa* means total dedication to an ideal or to a goal. In *karma sannyasa*, those people who are involved with the world but at the same time wish to maintain a spiritual identity, without necessarily having to change their lifestyle, can do so while living in the family situation, because the identity of the spirit is as important as the identity of the body.

Our body is known by a name. Just as we identify the body by a name, in the same way, initially the spirit also has to be identified by a name, and after we have been able to identify the spirit by a name we experience the nameless form of the spirit. It is awareness of the spirit which is the purpose of *karma sannyasa*. This identity remains with us all through life and motivates and inspires us to tread the spiritual path.

In the traditional texts it has been said that the name of the spirit is *sat-chit-ananda*. *Sat* means truth, *chit* means consciousness and *ananda* means bliss: the experience of truth and bliss as experienced in the totality of consciousness. Of course, this represents the highest identity of the spirit, but before we can elevate our minds to that height we have to concentrate on a particular quality or nature of the spirit. If we want to reach the ocean we have to follow the current of the stream which leads to it. Just in the same way, by becoming aware of the identity of a quality of spirit, we can reach the centre point.

This is the identity we receive and begin to understand in the process of *sannyasa* and *karma sannyasa*. It represents internal life, not external life. Full *sannyasa* represents external as well as internal life; *karma sannyasa* represents only the inner life regardless of what type of life you may lead externally. Therefore, the *sadhana* of *karma sannyasa* and of *sannyasa* begins with the realization of the concepts of *viveka* and *vairagya*. When, through these two concepts,

we are able to remove all the barriers that we have created around us, we attain moksha. This is the system.

In day-to-day life, karma sannyasins have to remember a few things. First, they have to be objective witnesses to everything that is taking place around them. On stage they act, but off stage they become themselves. Karma sannyasins should see the world as a stage where they have to act in the prescribed manner, but their internal consciousness and spirit remain at peace. This happens when they are able to understand their actions in relation to society, the family and themselves. It means that when they are depressed they have to be aware of their depression; when they are angry they have to be aware of their anger; when they are feeling jealousy and hatred they have to be aware of that expression, and when they feel compassion they also have to be aware of it, and must not be carried away by the force of these different expressions of energy. So, objective awareness is point number one.

Point number two: improve your performance. This we can understand better in terms of karma yoga. Karma yoga is not only physical, it is also mental and psychic. Mental and psychic karma yogas are the most difficult aspects of this branch of yoga. When we perform an action there should be no attachment to the result of that action and it should be done with total perfection or to the best of our ability. In the yogic books it is said that every individual is caught up in his own actions, but a yogi performs each action with the purpose of attaining self-purification, and this action is performed not only physically, but also through speech, through the mind and through the intellect.

For example, we try to control our speech. Speech here represents our external interaction and behaviour with society and the world. These expressions become more balanced, and this harmonization and balancing of our expression is the karma yoga of speech interaction.

Karma yoga of the mind entails awareness of the desire for self-satisfaction and also of other people's needs

and requirements, that is, assistance required from us as individuals. In other words, there is identification between a part of my mind and a part of your mind where we can understand each other; and my actions and behaviour do not influence you in a negative way.

There is also the karma yoga of intellect for developing *jñāna* or wisdom, and then there is the third aspect of karma sannyasa: *sadhana*. *Sadhana* begins with self-purification, the development of faith and austerity. As you can see, there are many aspects of karma sannyasa.

I like to compare taking karma sannyasa to getting a PhD. To get a PhD we must submit a thesis, and if it is accepted we are given a diploma, but with sannyasa it happens the other way round. You are given the diploma first and the teacher hopes that you will do your thesis afterwards. This is where 99.9 percent of people fail. They usually just frame the little karma sannyasa card and display it in their home. I have seen many sincere spiritual aspirants who, after they have taken karma sannyasa, never even go to one yoga class, or one satsang, or meditate or do anything, and everybody knows them by the name of Swami Such-and-such-ananda Saraswati. This is a wrong attitude for them to have, because if they have the inclination to be a karma sannyasin, the drive to experience the spirit should also be there.

Think hard about whether you actually want to take karma sannyasa or not. Do not jump into it because it is something new, for if the body is dirty you will not be able to hide the dirt by wearing new clothes. People will see through your new clothes.

How does yoga relate to our daily life?

In our daily life our personality, body, intellect and emotions are subject to stress and tension. Whether we are a sannyasin, a businessperson, a householder, a child or a student, stress, tension and anxiety constantly batter our personality in one way or another.

According to yoga, the manifestation of tension and stress is fourfold. The first manifestation is muscular tension, the second is nervous tension, the third is emotional tension and the fourth is intellectual tension.

When we are unable to manage these tensions, in time they can cause imbalance in the functions of our physiological systems. Tension and heightened levels of stress can create psychological and emotional imbalance and greatly reduce the efficiency, creativity and alertness of our consciousness.

Yoga practices are designed to remove the influence of tension and stress from our personality. That is the first aim of yoga.

People have many definitions and ideas about yoga. Some believe it to be a form of meditation; others say it is a form of religious practice or physical culture, and nothing more. There are also those who believe that it is a form of therapy, of preventive medicine. If we look at the word *yoga*, however, we find that it means union, union of our individual consciousness with the higher consciousness. It can be said that the ultimate goal of yoga is this: when all aspects of the human personality have been re-discovered, when all the faculties and potentials and energies have been awakened, and we know how to utilize them. We can say that the ultimate aim of yoga is to remove the limitations of the mind and to transcend the gross nature of the mind.

In the literature about yoga it is said that one can only develop spiritually with the help of a guru. How far can one go alone in yoga without the guidance of a guru? Is it even possible to practise on one's own, or is it just like gymnastics?

People who practise gymnastics can perform better asanas than any one of us present because of their greater flexibility. However, the importance of asanas, as opposed to gymnastics, is that they create a kind of pull and stretch and push in different areas, corresponding to the chakras. This kind of correct asana training is received by very few.

We can do surya namaskara and can just go through the twelve asanas without any problem and feel energetic and good. All that is correct, but when it comes to doing our yoga practices correctly, even the surya namaskara that we are doing now is not correct, because in each posture a pressure point has to be created in a particular area of the body. That is the point where you have to direct your awareness in the form of chakra concentration, and feel an added stretch, pull, tension, so that the nerves in that particular area are stimulated. This has been described in the book *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.

Where do you concentrate, for example, in position two? Vishuddhi, although the stretch is emphasized in the lower back. Some people think that if the stretch is in the lower back then we should concentrate more on the lower back, but this is not the case. You might be extending your spine one hundred percent in the lower back and putting the head slightly back, and keeping ten percent of the curve. However, if you make that curve into twenty percent, that is the actual yoga posture. From ten you should go to twenty, from twenty to thirty, from thirty to forty percent. Creating pranic activity in the area of a particular chakra is the actual aim of asana, and this has to be learned under the guidance of the guru.

When I used to teach, I faced that problem. The class used to do an asana, but when I would say, "Okay, now concentrate on vishuddhi", they would say, "But Swamiji, I feel more pull in the lower back. I can concentrate there better." Then I used to say, "Well, if you can concentrate better there, do so."

If you are interested in the proper and spontaneous growth of personality, then even in the learning of asanas, the guidance of guru is necessary. One can practise pranayama through means of books, the same as asana, but if you want to progress further, a guru is necessary because breath control is not the ultimate aim. Divers can control their breath longer than any one of us present, but they do not have awakened prana – that is an art, a science which has to be mastered. For

those who are especially interested, a guru is necessary every step of the way, from beginning to end, whether it concerns the physical aspect of yoga or the spiritual aspect.

In general, people come to yoga for some kind of therapy or loosening up, in which case they can practise by themselves without any problem. However even then, because not every detail can be explained in a book, if without realizing the limitations of your body, you do something wrong, there can be an after effect. Once you see a photograph in a book, for example someone doing perfect paschimottanasana, that becomes the target, "I have to do it like that!" However, if you push yourself too far in an attempt to do paschimottanasana, maybe you will push incorrectly. Perhaps you only need to relax your shoulders to do it properly. A small detail like that can make a big difference in the performance and benefit of the asana. We did try to have different courses which would specialize in little details like this but people were not interested. Originally, we were planning to have the Teacher's Training Course in three stages: beginners, intermediate and advanced, but everybody wants to learn yoga in one month's time.

Are the practices of yoga necessary for everyone?

The answer is, no. First, it is necessary that you look at your own self, your requirements, your strengths, your deficiencies, and try to overcome your own limitations.

People come to yoga for various reasons. Some come with physiological problems; some come because they want to learn how to relax and develop the ability to cope with the stress and tension of life; some come because they want to develop mentally, intellectually and emotionally; some come for spiritual reasons. First you have to define what your individual requirements are, whether physical, mental or spiritual, and then you can select a group of practices which are conducive to the attainment of your aims.

There may come a time when you overcome your problems and do not require yoga any more. If you have

a disease, you do not continue to take medicine all your life. Look at yoga from that point of view also, whether it is physical, psychological or spiritual.

There may also come a time when yoga becomes a part and parcel of your daily life, especially when you go into the spiritual aspect of it. If the question was asked from that point of view, then I would say that the practices of yoga are necessary for everyone who wants to evolve psychically and spiritually, but if it is asked from a purely physical or psychological viewpoint, then the practices of yoga are necessary only up to the point where you are able to overcome your physical, mental, emotional or intellectual difficulties. Whether you want to continue after overcoming the problems and limitations is your own personal choice. If you wish to continue, go ahead. If you wish to stop, stop right there.



What is the purpose of celibacy?

In the Indian tradition there is no such thing as celibacy. The word *brahmacharya* is connected with the idea of celibacy, but the literal meaning of *brahmacharya* is 'one who roams in Brahma consciousness.' *Brahma acharya*: one who follows the law of the divine. In the Indian system there has never been any place for celibacy, mainly because of the four concepts of artha, dharma, kama and moksha.

This is the tradition, but, as always, changes happen over the course of time. Typically, renunciates were different from normal human beings in that they had no possessions or family attachments, led a secluded life and had control over sensual pleasures. At some point they started to come to the forefront of society and a general term was used to describe them, 'brahmachari' or 'celibate'. Eventually, this idea was associated with the renouncing of sensual pleasure. If you can do that then well and good; if you cannot, still well and good. Both ways involve no harm as long as the idea of who you are and what you are doing is clear in your mind.

The term 'celibacy', as it is used today, represents a state of non-attachment to any kind of pleasure. One of the most powerful desires in human life is *kama*, or sensual and sexual satisfaction. Those who can overcome this desire through some method of sadhana or meditation are able to reverse the flow of energy. The extroverted mind represents energy flowing outwards and dissipating, but through a process of sadhana we are able to change the flow of energy so that instead of moving downwards it begins to flow upwards. It is very clearly stated in the practices of pranayama, prana vidya, kundalini yoga and kriya yoga, that *apana*, one of the *vayus* or pranic winds, is a downward-moving force located in the region between the navel and the perineum. This aspect of energy controls the unconscious desires, visions, samskaras and sense of security inherent in every individual.

As long as *apana* is flowing downwards, naturally there will be an attraction to sensual pleasures. Therefore, although you might have been meditating for twenty years, the flow

of energy may not have changed and the activity of the unconscious and of the personality will continue to be the same. You may become a yogi and practise meditation for thirty, forty, or fifty years, but if the pranas have not changed, then your mind will run after the pleasures of life. The desire for satisfaction will continue to rise up. So, the reversal of the apanic flow is actual celibacy according to both tantra and yoga, and it is used to overcome or transcend the natural programming of human identity, personality and desire.

Is there a yogic approach to parenthood?

Children have to be encouraged, and not neglected. It is important that the encouragement should not take the form of emotional or subjective attachment. How does one encourage a child? By supporting the needs and the requirements of the child.

We do not necessarily support or encourage a child by saying, “I love you very much.” The moment you say that, there is some kind of emotional feeling being projected regarding the concept and feeling of love. That makes the child dependent on the word which you have said, “love.” Then the child begins to expect that love from you all the time and an emotional dependency has been created.

If the child finds that you are not acting according to the concept of love which has developed, such as a pat on the back, a kiss on the forehead or cheek, receiving a sweet or a chocolate, then he will become disturbed. He may not think it out rationally; it will be in the form of a feeling which will just generate from inside, “Today I have been on my best behaviour and I haven’t had a pat on my back”, and that will have an effect.

The opposite is also true. If we push, then we dump our own neurosis on to the mind of the child, which will affect the growth and development of the child. The bond or link between parent and child has to be on a very simple basis. Children understand simplicity and naturalness, and that is what they expect of their parents also.

Children do not have any barriers. They are able to express themselves as they wish. They find that adults are unable to express themselves because of their rigid nature, and that affects the children. So 'being natural' is the best kind of samskara and inner link that a parent can provide to a child. Simplicity is the most appropriate kind of encouragement that a parent can provide. Simplicity does not mean austerity. When you are with a child, speak the language of the child; do not speak your own language.

How does the awakening of energy manifest itself in the chakras?

We have to understand the manifestation of energy in the chakras in relation to the centre of our mind with which a particular chakra is connected. For example, mooladhara is the chakra which is connected with our fears, complexes and phobias. Certain attributes have been given to mooladhara, some positive, some negative. When we are able to transcend the negative attributes and develop the positive ones by overcoming our fears, inhibitions and complexes, and when we can gain mastery over a certain element, over a certain sense organ or body function, then that represents the awakening of the related chakra.

In books on the chakras you will find charts where the positive and negative attributes, the deva, the deity, the colour, the element, the bija and other mantras in all the chakras have been explained, including our publication *Kundalini Tantra*.

Awakening any chakra will bring its own kind of experience, and the kundalini awakening will intensify that experience. You will be able to control the experiences following the awakening of the chakras, but once kundalini awakens you will not be able to control them. It is a state which can even cause social disturbances. Some people may think you are mad, therefore the awakening of kundalini is usually feared. Everyone wants to have an awakened kundalini, but nobody can control the initial awakening. This is where we need the guidance of the guru.

















The kundalini can awaken without any preparation. This has happened to many people, and it will continue to happen, because kundalini, apart from the creative energy or force that it represents, also represents evolution and the elimination of samskaras and karmas. Evolution of consciousness takes place when we eliminate samskaras and karmas. In many of us, the elimination takes place at the unconscious level without any effort on our part, without any prior knowledge at the conscious level. Suddenly we find many experiences taking place – peculiar physiological sensations are felt, uncontrollable emotions explode and uncontrollable internal experiences occur.

There was once a pandit by the name of Gopi Krishna who had the experience of spontaneous awakening, but he was unable to control it. Previously, he had no indication that it was going to happen. He simply felt a great rush of energy, and at that time he used to see the whole world completely transformed. Poems used to flow out of him spontaneously. His vision used to change completely – the colours of the leaves, the flowers, the sun rays, the trees. Then he would come back to the normal state. He became very ill because he was not ready; he was not prepared for such an awakening.

If we only have time for a very short practice each day, what should be our approach to yoga in our daily life?

To gain the maximum benefit from a very short practice of yoga in our daily life, there has to be a balance between the practices of asana and pranayama, relaxation, concentration and meditation.

Asanas are very commonly known practices of yoga and many people practise them. They are of two different types. One group is the dynamic practices and the other group is the static practices. The aim of asana is to tune the body to the point where everything is working in perfect coordination. Our muscular, endocrine, nervous, respiratory, digestive and cardiovascular systems should all work in coordination with each of the other systems of the body and

thus provide total health. The concept of health in yoga is not having a muscular body, but a body which is free from tension, stress and disease. Regardless of what your body looks like, whether you are thin or fat, young or old, the dynamic group of asana provides that.

When we practise the physical postures of yoga and we have limited time, we should always remember that ninety percent of the life of our body is spent in movements which involve forward bending. Very rarely do we bend our body back or stretch and twist it sideways. If you are interested in practising asanas, this is the first thing to keep in mind. Perform those asanas which provide complete balance to the body by stretching it backward, forward, upward, and twisting it to each side. The practice of a few rounds of surya namaskara, as well as tadasana and trikonasana, are more than enough for daily practice.

The asana influence the various systems of the body starting with the muscular system and the major organs such as the lungs, stomach, intestines, liver, pancreas and kidneys. They encourage optimal endocrine system function and create a combination of massage, stretching and relaxing. In this way we are able to stretch the internal organs of the body. Many ailments and problems which are caused by an imbalance in our lifestyle are automatically removed.

The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* wherein the dejected mind of Arjuna is described is called 'Arjuna Vishada Yoga'. What does that imply?

The message of the *Bhagavad Gita* is very clear and precise. Arjuna, the great warrior, finds himself in a dilemma at the commencement of the Mahabharata War, when he is placed opposite to all his family members, respected elders and many great kings and emperors of that time who are gathered on the battle field. At that moment the thought comes to him, that if in order to win the kingdom it is necessary to destroy all these people who are dear to him, then what is the use of fighting the war?

Faced with this conflict he undergoes a state of nervous breakdown which is very clearly described in the first chapter. He tells Krishna how he is feeling, “My whole body is shaking and trembling, the bow is falling from my hand and each and every hair of my body is standing on end. I can’t think properly; I can’t see things properly; I have no strength.” These are the symptoms of a person who is undergoing a state of nervous breakdown.

When you confront real fear, what is your physical reaction? Trembling, sweating, agitation of the heart and loss of strength from the body. That is exactly what Arjuna experienced when he was facing the Kaurava army, not because he was a coward, but because he identified himself subjectively with the worldly environment and pleasures. This chapter of *Vishada Yoga*, the ‘yoga of depression’, is not only written in the *Bhagavad Gita* but in the first chapter of every person’s life, because as long as we are content, as long as we have something, we do not look beyond the things that are within our reach. However, when we are in trouble, when we are in a state of conflict and tension, we try to find a solution. It is this process of finding the solution which becomes the first chapter of one’s life. Arjuna faced it in the form of depression and conflict. We might face it in the form of a disease, ailment, mental tension, depression, anxiety, frustration, phobia, inhibition, complex or anything!

The teaching which Krishna then gives to Arjuna comes in a sequence. The second chapter is related to *Samkhya Yoga*, the ‘yoga of understanding’, the concept of Purusha and Prakriti, Shiva and Shakti, Brahman and Maya, consciousness and energy, and what your role is in this cosmic play. This also marks the beginning of yoga, for a sincere sadhaka who is more concerned with his psychic and spiritual evolution, should understand the relationship that an individual has with the universal or cosmic mind. After realizing where we stand in life we can express ourselves more effectively, efficiently and creatively, and this time not only for material but also for inner gain. I am not using the word ‘spiritual’

or ‘psychic’; I am using the word ‘inner’ which can comprise whatever we want to achieve.

In the subsequent chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna presents the various systems, the various paths that an individual can take up in order to achieve perfection. The concept of spiritual identity presented by Krishna is very practical. He says that while you live in the world, while you are the actor, you have to behave like one. Rather than subjective involvement you should have objective awareness, by which you should be able to observe, experience and realize everything. Once you are able to integrate this particular quality into your behaviour, understanding and action, then you reach a state of mental perfection and harmony, and that is spirituality.

Further on, Krishna defines the various practices of yoga for different temperaments. The idea of different personality types is not new to Indian or yogic philosophy, but is very clearly stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* itself, a book that is supposed to have been expounded by Krishna about five thousand years ago.

One type of temperament is devotional, the bhakti temperament. For this type, there are the practices of bhakti yoga which is a science in itself. There is a chapter on bhakti yoga explaining its different systems and practices and what the exact attitude should be at the time of practise. When you close your eyes and repeat your mantra, chant kirtan and bhajan, or say your prayers, that is not bhakti; it is only a system or tradition which we have been following for so many years. However, there is a definite science of bhakti yoga which Krishna explains.

There is karma yoga for the dynamic temperament. Krishna again and again re-emphasizes, “Perform an action, but surrender everything to me. Do not expect any results, any fruits from the action; just do it! Gain experience and perfect yourself.”

Krishna prescribes the practice of jnana yoga for the intellectual temperament and for people with a psychic

temperament, he outlines the system required to develop the psyche. He also goes further and describes the system required in order to lead a happy, contented life. This is the basis of the tradition of karma sannyasa: how to live in the world but lead a detached life, fulfilling one's obligations, duties and dharma. A warrior's dharma is to fight, as Arjuna was supposed to do. For a grihastha, a householder, the main dharma is to look after the family. Whatever the householder does is for the welfare of the family. He performs this dharma under any circumstances while maintaining conscious awareness.

One's concentration should be on one's spiritual aim and objective, so that there is no deviation, no conflict and no duality – one's aim is clear! However, we must realize that this type of deep understanding will only come to us when we are confronted with a situation which requires or draws out that type of understanding and knowledge.

Yoga does not begin with asana, pranayama or meditation. Initially, it begins with our choice. We want to learn how to meditate so we go to a yoga teacher and ask, "Can you teach me meditation?" We do not even know what spirituality means at that point. Or we may have a health problem, so we ask a teacher to help us. We will be taught some yoga practices and we will feel better. This is still not the real beginning of yoga. The beginning of yoga comes after *vishada*, 'depression', when there is the desire for a deeper understanding, and then the search to overcome this state begins. This is the real beginning of yoga!

Can yoga therapy be combined with other forms of treatment, for example allopathy, homeopathy, or other alternative therapies?

One of the main aims of yoga is to provide balance and harmony between the systems of body, mind and spirit. However, when it comes to therapy, initially we may require the help of alternative therapies including allopathy, naturopathy, homeopathy, and others in order to reduce

the symptoms, the external manifestations of a problem. Simultaneously we should continue with yoga therapy which can eliminate the root of the problem.

It is better to discontinue the use of other therapies once you have used them to help reduce the intensity of suffering and pain from the body and mind. For example, if I have a tremendous stomach problem, constipation, diarrhoea, dysentery or even hernia, with the help of other therapies I can try to alleviate these problems in order to reach a point where, with the practices of yoga, I can attempt to eradicate them.

Now, if someone with an ulcer or hernia reads in a book that the practices of shankhaprakshalana help to clean the stomach and intestines and they do it, what will be the result? Internal bleeding which will then show in the stool. Therefore, a person who is involved in yoga therapy should know its basic rules which are first to reduce the amount of suffering and pain through the use of other therapies. From there one can then start with the practice of yoga, which can re-balance the system.

Take a complaint like asthma, for example. Some people who suffer chronically from asthma require the help of medication at the time of an attack, some kind of injection which can ease breathing. After that, the practice of kunjal or vastra dhauti will bring better results.

In order for yoga therapy to be effective, the body should be free from excessive pain and suffering, maybe not one hundred percent but at least forty or fifty percent. It is not necessary for somebody to have a good understanding of the medical sciences, anatomy or physiology in order to approach yoga therapy, but it is necessary for the practitioner to have good common sense.

At what stage does the mind of a child become conditioned? Can yoga prevent it?

The yogic tradition says that initially the mind is totally unprogrammed. The programming of the mind on the

subtle levels of the unconscious and subconscious begins from the fourth or fifth month after conception. External programming commences when we start our education.

On a deeper level, we are involuntarily storing impressions, ideas, and concepts which build our personality. While the deeper self is receiving this input of impressions and instinctive experiences, there is no blockage via any intellectual concept of right and wrong. Regardless of samskaras or karmas, this is something physical and external which happens after birth.

Yoga views the growth of the externalized faculty of intellect as one of the main barriers to the full awakening of the potential of the mind. The mind is only twenty-five percent intellect, while the remaining seventy-five percent is intuitive and experiential. This has been the classification of mind in the descriptions of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*, which comprise twenty-five percent each.

As we awaken the external faculty of *buddhi*, or the intelligence, and by not allowing the aspect of *viveka* in *buddhi* to evolve naturally and spontaneously, the intuitive and experiential faculties of the mind are blocked. Thus, at a later stage we become fixed in our own concepts, ideas, beliefs and direction in life. Often, when people begin to rediscover their own true nature through various practices and meditative techniques, they go through a process of purging impressions, of eliminating ideas and concepts which have created a false self-image of themselves as individuals. At a later stage of life, when purification takes place, one becomes more receptive because with the elimination of the intellectual blockage, the intuitive and psychic faculties are able to express themselves naturally. In a child, these faculties are fully active. Yoga does not consider this as a transcendental state of mind in a child, but rather as the process of spontaneous growth in the child's consciousness.

What is kriya yoga and how can we tell when it is suitable for us?

Kriya yoga is considered to be an advanced technique which is geared for the awakening of the psychic centres and the creative energy in the form of the inherent kundalini, which lies dormant in every individual. Prior to the practice of kriya yoga, there has to be mastery over other yogas such as hatha yoga and the cleansing practices or *shatkarmas*. The body should have attained a certain degree of purification. One has to be aware of the pranic flow within the body, of the chakra system, and how the chakras influence the various manifestations of the personality. One must be able to practise the techniques of raja yoga as well as have a certain amount of control over the body: the ability to sit in a particular posture for a certain length of time, and to retain the breath in order to create physiological changes in the cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular and endocrinal systems. The ability to convert the normal parameters through the practice of pranayama and asana must be achieved. There also has to be an understanding of the various practices for the awakening of the mental faculties, the techniques of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Unless and until we understand the processes of hatha and raja yoga, it is not advisable to go deeply into the kriya yoga practices.

Often in kriya yoga we encounter psychic experiences which alter our perception of the body, and which change our behaviour, affect our emotions and make us more sensitive. If we are surrounded by some kind of positive or negative influences and we do not know how to observe them, but dwell in the experiences of those emotions, it can restrict our growth and the awakening of the chakras and kundalini.

Anybody can practise kriya yoga. Everyone is entitled to awaken the kundalini and the chakras, but there has to be a basic understanding of the hatha and raja yoga techniques. After that the process becomes much easier as kriya yoga is a combination of many techniques which have evolved

through the experiences of the awakening of prana, of lifetimes of karmas and samskaras, and of the awakening of kundalini.

In *Kundalini Tantra*, at the end of the kriyas it finishes with visualization of the golden egg. Can you discuss this in relation to kundalini and samadhi?

The awakening of kundalini does not culminate in samadhi. It is simply an experience of another dimension where we experience harmony and perfection. In this dimension or material plane, the concept of the golden egg is the awareness of the transcendental body. It is also known as the *karana sharira*, causal body or *jyoti linga*, the linga of light in sahasrara. The golden egg is the seat of the spirit.

Tantrics and yogis have envisioned the human personality and its different dimensions in the form of an egg. We do not know why they chose this symbol. The perennial question is, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Nobody knows the answer. So the yogis thought, instead of getting caught up in this controversy, let us visualize a golden egg instead of a golden chicken. Jokes aside, the egg represents the seed form. It has a shape, and an identity. It represents the seed or source of consciousness from a point which we call bindu.

The concept of divinity involves the aspects of nada, bindu and kalaa. *Nada*, the first aspect, is vibration, the source of all sound. Whenever there is activity there is bound to be friction and vibration. Even if you move your hand in front of you in the air there is friction between the hand and the air. If you could hear the sound of that friction, it would be like waving a stick and listening to the sound “Whoosh!” Wherever there is activity there is bound to be some vibration in very subtle frequencies, inaudible to us of course, because our range of hearing is limited.

The mind moves, and within the mind there is also the experience of nada or vibration. Thoughts and emotions are created, and within them there is the experience of

nada. Wherever there is even the tiniest activity, there is the experience of nada, and this nada governs every aspect of creation.

Bindu is the second aspect, the source. Externally, there is a source or cause behind any action, thought or feeling. Mentally, there is a point from where feelings, emotions, desires, visions, and even ego manifest. Spiritually, there is a point where we experience the atman, and even beyond that there is a point where we experience the *paramatman*, divine consciousness. The point that leads to diverse experience is known as bindu.

Kalaa, the third aspect, represents the different manifestations of matter and energy, the known elements and the unknown elements beyond the range of human conception. It includes all the spirit forms, energy forms, and physical forms: rock, tree, flower, water, stone . . . everything. If there is no manifestation there is no creation.

The divine being is transcendental, but the awareness of divinity, the consciousness of the supreme self is experienced in the form of a golden egg. Just as the identity of a tree is contained within the seed, contained within the egg we find these three things. The whole process of creation and the unfolding of consciousness and energy are related to the causal body, which controls the invisible, unknown perceptions, activities and dimensions.

The awakening of kundalini opens up various doors and dimensions within the personality. This is represented in the form of the chakras, the known elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether, as well as the known aspect of consciousness, the mind, and finally the unknown aspect of consciousness in sahasrara, in the form of a thousand-petal lotus. Nobody has counted the thousand petals; it is a form, which is symbolic of the many different manifestations. It is here that we experience the golden egg.

There is a major difference between samadhi and the awakening of kundalini. In kundalini awakening we become aware of the three aspects of nada, bindu and kalaa. In

samadhi, we go beyond the seed of awareness and transcend these three experiences. Therefore, it is not correct to equate samadhi with the awakening of kundalini.

If spirituality is the solution to human problems then why do we run after materialism?

Before our arrival on this planet, God called each one of us and told us that materialism was our birthright, because in the worldly dimension, we have to utilize our senses, we have to use our mind, we have to interact with others through the senses, intellect and emotions. These are qualities of life which pull the mind towards the external experience of desire, achievement and ambition. Therefore materialism, said God, was our birthright. This was the message of God.

Now, concerning spirituality, God said that we can achieve spirituality by following certain conditions and that is also our birthright, but first is materialism because we are dealing with the experience of matter. We are living in the world of matter; we are confined to the experience of time, space and object. If we want to leave this and become spiritual, then we have to make an effort to come closer to our inner nature and understand the experience of the soul, the *atman*. This coming in contact with the deeper personality is spirituality, being in communion with the spirit.

There are some people who realize that running after material satisfaction and achievement is just one aspect of life, the external aspect, but that there is also the dimension of energy, and in this dimension of energy there is no experience of limited time, space and object. There is a continuity of consciousness, a continuity of experience. Those few people who realize this make an effort through different religious practices and systems of thought such as Samkhya, Vedanta, yoga and others, to experience their deep inner nature.

After some time we all realize or come to understand that, in order to be happy, to be content in life there has to be a balance between the dimension of matter and the dimension of energy. Otherwise, we are simply confined to

the external experiences, and ninety-nine percent of the world population is moving in an external direction. Only about one percent of the whole world population is aware that there is something beyond the external, and those people are known as spiritual.

Once we become aware that spirituality is also an experience, a state of our being, the problems, the frustrations, the depressions that come with the extroverted expression of personality, with the extroverted mind and ego, are automatically solved. Therefore the saying goes that if one is spiritual one can be free from the bondage of the world. This expression does not mean liberation or self-realization, it simply means that we go beyond the limit that we have created in our personality, and have a broader vision of life.

I cannot get rid of anger and pride. Are there any special yogic methods by which to stop them?

All of yoga is such a method, but there are different yogic paths. There is one practice called antar mouna, where you become aware of your thoughts. When you are very angry and you are reacting you should know that you are reacting due to anger.

I do know it, but still I have no control.

Let it happen. If you get angry and you want to tear something, tear it, but you should try to develop awareness of your actions and also detachment from them. Do not try to stop yourself at first, because if you try to stop, the emotion will become more intense.

But it hurts my friends and relatives sometimes.

Ah! That is a risk that we have to take in order to improve ourselves, because if we try to stop our anger completely at first it will burst violently like a dam. Just allow a little bit at a time to come out, and in that way you will find that the energy you have stored will transform itself into positive energy. Energy needs an outlet. Usually we are involved with

the world and so do not have control over the faculties of the mind, over our daily actions. Our energies are dissipated in all directions, spilling out all over the place. Therefore the projection of our energy can be a negative one. However, if it is controlled and focused it will become positive. It will be channelled in the right direction.

Are there different types of energy?

No. Only the manifestation of energy is different.

What about gross energies and refined energies?

They are different manifestations of the same energy source. With the same electrical energy you can light a small bulb and you can also light a big bulb. Every thought, every feeling, every emotion is one energy, but it manifests on different levels of consciousness. When you are awake and active you have a particular frame of mind, and when you have people around you, you are in a different frame of mind than when you are alone in your room. These three states create three different personalities.

We get energy from different things – from food, air, water and directly from the cosmos. Does each source give its own type of energy from the finest to the most gross? For example, somebody in the city who is eating meat will absorb gross energy, while somebody who is sitting in the Himalayas and eating nothing will absorb refined energy. Is fine energy not always superior to the gross?

Yes, it is.

But you are saying that all this is one and the same energy?

Yes, I am.

It is a contradiction.

How can it be a contradiction? The gross is manifest, the subtle is unmanifest.

What is the definition, purpose and meaning of ‘karma yoga’ and is it necessary for everybody?

Yes, it is necessary for everybody, because throughout our life we are performing *karmas*, actions and deeds, and these work on our psyche also. They influence our mind and different areas of our perception and existence.

The maintenance of our body is a precise process. We absorb and we eliminate; we take in and we expel. This is the natural process to maintain the health of the body. Inhale air and exhale air; take in food and water and then excrete it. In the same way, the things which we absorb through our mind or inner life must also come out in a different way. Do we breathe out exactly the same air as we breathe in? No, it contains carbon. Does the food that we eat come out in the same form of rice, dal, vegetable and bread? No, it comes out in the form of toxic elements which have not been absorbed by the system.

In a similar manner we perform our sadhana. We practise asana, japa, or meditation. It also involves elimination, because sadhana removes the toxins and impurities that are inherent in the inner personality. This elimination of the negative aspects of our personality occurs through the practice of karma yoga.

It has been clearly defined in the *Bhagavad Gita* that yogis perform actions with the attitude of non-attachment for the purpose of self-purification, and the actions are performed through the body, mind and speech. Action is not only related to physical action, for the concept of action belongs to the whole personality, both gross and subtle.

The purging of the negative elements takes place through the process of karma yoga, so it is essential to change one's attitude towards action. The selfish attitude must become an unselfish attitude. First, we were attached to our actions and now we must become non-attached. Initially, all our actions were done for the satisfaction of our ego, now they are to be done for satisfying and helping others. Therefore, everything remains the same, only the attitude changes.

Why does one take mantra initiation? They say it is for smooth sailing through life. What is its main purpose?

Mantra has many purposes and among these is to provide inner stability, inner peace and strength. When we are confronted with the tensions of life and our mind is cloudy, when we lose the clarity of perception and along with it the stability of our inner nature, the disrupted aspects of our personality do not allow our creative nature to manifest. Mantra can rectify this; it helps tranquillize the various faculties of the mind through its constant vibrational effect.

In the science of mantra every sound vibration has a particular frequency. One example is music. If you play a note on the harmonium while a piece of paper with some very fine sand rests on top of it, the sand will take shape, depending on the frequency of the sound which is being emitted. There are many other examples which can be given to illustrate this point. If you put thirty grandfather clocks in a room with their pendulums swinging at random, after a few hours their pendulums will swing in the same direction simultaneously.

We are constantly producing frequencies in our environment through our speech, thought patterns, feelings and emotional expressions, and mantra helps us to achieve a point of balance in the frequencies we are emitting.

The mind has a certain frequency, thoughts and feelings have a certain frequency, although we may not be aware of these. We may think of our emotions in the form of words or images, we may think of our emotions in the form of likes and dislikes, something which is acceptable and something which is not acceptable, but the frequencies they emit definitely have a very powerful effect on our personality. Many times you may pass a person on the street and think, "Oh, what a nice person!" Or you may pass another and get a very peculiar vibration. Without any logic, without any means of communication we get these feelings. We can infer from this that we are constantly emitting and transmitting our energy in the form of wavelengths and frequencies. Yoga

has been saying this for a very long time and it is now being accepted by modern science as well.

Mantras are sounds. Today, mantras are thought of as being religious, but they are not. If I say the mantra Rama, from a religious point of view I may think of Lord Rama who lived on earth five, six or ten thousand years ago; I may think it is a name of God, but actually it is not. Within the body there are psychic centres and each psychic centre is affected by particular sound vibrations. The mantra Rama corresponds to one particular psychic centre and it helps to awaken that psychic centre and the faculties that are attributed to it.

It is from this point of view that we look at mantras in yoga, in the light of awakening the dormant faculties of the personality. It is for this reason that we repeat or chant the mantra, in order to create a vibration, an awakening of the psychic centres within the body so that their qualities can manifest within us, and we can attain peace, stability and concentration. Simultaneously, we can awaken the faculties of our mind which will allow the free flow of consciousness to express itself in a positive way.

What are the conscious, subconscious and unconscious states?

This can be explained in two ways. One is according to modern psychology, and is quite well known to everyone, while the other is according to ancient theory. I believe that the ancient theories are more accurate because they are more experiential, and in many ways more practical than the theory of modern psychology. Modern psychology is only two hundred years old, but ancient psychology, which is explained in yoga and tantra, is over five thousand years old.

Psychology does not change, only the interpretation changes. The mind does not change, only the interpretation of the experiences of the mind changes. Intellect, emotions or feelings do not change. Interactions do not change; it is only the interpretation which changes. What we call

conscious, subconscious and unconscious has been explained conceptually in various systems of thought as: the state of wakefulness, or gross experience; the state of dream, or subtle experience; and the state of sleep, or causal experience. This is a general explanation which represents the conscious, subconscious and unconscious states.

What activities do we attribute to conscious perception? One attribute of consciousness is that we are alert. We are also aware and analytical. We are observing, analyzing and judging everything. Experiences are being gained through the senses, the intellect, the emotions, the feelings and different sensations.

What are the attributes of the subconscious? The filtering of information received, the storing of information for future use, and the elimination of irrelevant information. We remove completely from our memory bank that which we do not need, and that which is relevant we store in our memory bank. If we have to multiply something only the awareness of multiplication comes forward, although the awareness of division, subtraction and adding are also there. Thus, whatever is required for our immediate expression comes to the surface of the mind to enable us to interact with the world, and what is not necessary is immediately stored in some corner of the memory.

What is the attribute of the unconscious? In the unconscious there is total absence of external awareness. What happens when you are under anaesthesia and an operation is taking place? The body is being cut, but there is an absence of physical awareness. What happens when you sleep? There is an absence of external awareness, but the state is nevertheless an active state of being.

Please talk about what happens to the soul or spirit after the death of the physical body?

Where does the soul go after death? It is an eternal question that everyone keeps asking. One has to remember that the soul is in the form of energy. It may have a body, we do not

know, because our physical eyes have their limitations. Just as we cannot hear sounds which are below or above the human hearing range, in the same way we cannot see many things which are outside the range of our vision. Just as we cannot see many colours, we cannot see an invisible spirit. It is there, it may have a body, but we do not know what kind of a body it has.

Yoga has tried to describe the body by saying it is in the form of a kosha. We hear of the five koshas: *annamaya kosha*, the physical body; *pranamaya kosha*, the field or body of energy; *manomaya kosha*, the field of the mind; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the field of the intellect; and *anandamaya kosha*, the field of the spirit.

The spiritual tradition says that there are three aspects of the spirit:

1. *Sat*: meaning, not truth in the sense we take it, but truth meaning something which does not deviate from the eternal law of the divine or of nature.

2. *Chit*: people say chit means consciousness, but it does not; chit means the observer, the witness of everything that is taking place anywhere and everywhere. When we watch a film and identify with what is happening on the screen, we might cry and laugh, because there is total identification with what is happening in the film. But if we are simply observers, then even seeing comic or tragic scenes we will not feel either happy or sad. It would be like watching nothing at all, while at the same time being aware of what is happening out there.

That is the concept of chit. The spirit is aware of everything but it is totally disassociated and unaffected by what is happening; it is simply an observer. Like the video camera on the wall of some supermarket. It simply observes everything and keeps on taking photographs.

3. *Ananda*: means bliss, but not bliss in terms of worldly happiness. It means a universal experience of harmony, of integration, of unity and oneness. There is no experience of duality; there is only the experience of unity, and the beatitude that comes with that experience is known as ananda.

Hence, these are the three qualities of the soul or spirit as defined by the spiritual tradition. Now, if we consider these three qualities to be the actual representation of spirit or *atman*, how can something which is simply the observer of everything around suddenly become human? Human means taking birth in the body. How can an ocean suddenly become a drop? It is not possible. Take the sun for example. Are the rays of the sun different from the actual sun or are they the same? This is a typical question of vedantic philosophy.

How do we perceive the sun? We do not perceive the sun; we perceive the rays of the sun. How can we define the sun as something bright, a ball of fire hanging high up in the heavens, so far away from the earth, containing hydrogen, nitrogen, this gas, that gas? That is only our speculation, we have never been there. We are only seeing the external object and then rationalizing from what we see. Just as we have speculated about the sun, the yogis also speculated about the spirit.

The ocean contains many waves. What is the source of these waves or currents within the ocean? We do not know. How is a wave created, how is the current created within the body of the ocean? The scientists have a theory and we can understand it according to that theory. We consider *paramatma*, the supreme soul, to be like the body of that ocean and the *jivatma*, the individual soul, to be currents that are generated within the ocean for some reason that is inexplicable at present.

At the time of death, when the physical identity has been lost, the force behind the current subsides, and water simply merges with water. The manifestation of consciousness and the *vrittis* of consciousness arise again, which again create a current, and that current is known as birth. After the force of the current is finished, again there is total merger.

Even the most sattvic person having a rajasic desire will carry on with that rajasic desire in his next incarnation. It is one's nature at the time of death which is important, and therefore the tradition says one should practise meditation at

this time. Different traditions have given various techniques for harmonizing and balancing oneself before death.

How can I, a yoga-minded person, fit into society with all its temptations and distractions without having to change my lifestyle completely?

If you think that ‘yoga-minded’ people are different from ordinary people who live in society with all its temptations and distractions, then you are not a yoga-minded person. A yoga-minded person seeks balance amidst all the conflicts, turmoil and temptations of life, and that is yoga. Yoga does not say you have to behave or act in a certain way. What would be the use? We would be trying to get out of one set of programming by creating another set, by binding our mind and ourselves into another rigid frame of existence.

If a man is a criminal he is bound by his lifestyle. If he becomes a very charitable person who distributes clothes, money and food and leaves his criminal tendencies behind, still he is a bound man. In one way he is bound by the negative side of life, on the other he is bound by the positive side. He is still tempted, still distracted. That is not yoga. If yoga was for criminals only, it would not be called yoga, it would be known as criminal rehabilitation therapy. If yoga was only for positive-minded people, then it would be known as the practice for cloud-walkers and day-dreamers.

If you are a yoga-minded person, then you should be the first to jump into the fray of life and invite others to follow you, “Look, I am enjoying life to its fullest! Why are you sitting there on one side suffering, or why are you sitting on the other side enjoying? Why don’t you experience everything as it is without expecting either suffering or happiness?”

Why should one use different malas for different kinds of practices? What is the relevance of the different types of mala?

Every mala has an energy field around it. This has been seen in the Kirlian photographs. Some have more; some have

less. Tulsi, rudraksha, crystal, sandalwood, and any other kind of wooden or stone mala has its own particular field of energy which radiates from the centre of each bead outwards. Some malas lose that energy with use while some project it more and more. Different kinds of malas are prescribed for different things in life, like illnesses.

According to tradition, people who follow the tantric system use a special kind of mala. People who follow the Vedanta or Samkhya system use the tulsi mala. Those who follow the Shaiva sect of the tantras use rudraksha malas. Followers of the Shakti system use sandalwood. Avadhutas, who do not actually belong to any denomination, use the crystal mala. Malas like tulsi, rudraksha, red sandal or crystal hold and concentrate that energy and so these four are used in the yogic system.

Now when giving malas, we simply consider the personality of an individual, because malas can either activate or tranquillize the pranic activity. For example, if a depressed person uses a rudraksha mala it will help revitalize the whole system. If a person wishes to concentrate and tranquillize the mind they should use tulsi or sandalwood mala. Depending on individuals and their needs, different malas are prescribed, but the most common one is tulsi, because it is an all-round mala.

Can we practise different meditations during the day?

Whether you practise one or twenty-four for the twenty-four hours, it makes no difference, because the concept of meditation is having proper mental concentration and one-pointedness without dissipation of the mental and psychic energies. If you can achieve this one-pointedness of the inner perceptions and the inner mind, even for five minutes in twenty-four hours, it should be enough to take you to dimensions unknown instantaneously. Later on, this state transforms itself into the state of samadhi. In samadhi there is a continuous one-pointedness and total identification with the object or symbol of meditation.

I do not think that by practising different meditations at different times of the day you will improve your mental concentration, rather, the mind will come under tension more and more, because the natural habit of the mind is not to sit quietly. The habit of an extroverted mind is to go from one sensory experience to another. The natural habit of the mind is to move and to fly. If you try to force yourself to sit quietly, to concentrate and become one-pointed, there will come a time when the mind will rebel against you. Rebellion will take place in the form of depression, neurosis, psychosis, frustration and so forth.

Why let that happen? Just do one meditation a day, and if you reach the point of unity, if you reach that state of one-pointedness, try to extend the time from five minutes to six, from six to seven, seven to eight, and so on. Go on extending until you make it twenty-four hours. The moment you make it twenty-four hours, it becomes samadhi. Do not worry about it. Stick to one meditation sadhana and perfect that stage. That is more important.

Can the visualization of the chakras or body parts be considered similar to autosuggestion? If not, then what is the difference?

At the time of meditation sadhana when we are asked to visualize a chakra or a specific part of the body, the mental perception undergoes a transformation and when there is total identification with this image, it becomes a living experience.

I will give you one example. A man comes to a guru and says, "I want to learn how to meditate." The guru says, "Okay, I will teach you meditation. Start by visualizing the symbol of your deity." The man tries for a week, comes back to the guru and says, "Sorry, I can't do it. I can't see the image of my deity." The guru asks, "Why?" The man replies, "Well, whenever I begin to think of my deity the image of my buffalo comes to my mind." The guru says, "All right, concentrate on your buffalo. Forget your deity." The man

begins to concentrate, “Buffalo, buffalo, buffalo.” There is complete identification because his buffalo is something to which the man feels close; it is a solid form of identification, not abstract. Ultimately he becomes one with the buffalo. The guru becomes worried because he has not seen him around for many days. He goes and calls him to come out of room. The man replies, “Sorry Guruji, I can’t come out of the room.” “Why?” asks the guru. “Because I won’t fit through the door”, comes the answer.

You know things like this do happen, where a concept or an idea in a deep meditative state becomes a living experience; it is so real that it symbolizes a total integration and unity of the different facets and faculties of consciousness.

The simple process of imagination helps to channel and focus the different energies and eliminate the concept of duality. Living experience takes place in the realm of unity. Since we are unable to comprehend the state of unity and are very much conscious of duality, “me”, “my body”, “that is something different from me”, first comes about process of imagination. Whether we visualize the chakras, the ishta or anything else, gradually, as we are able to develop affinity with our symbol, our perception becomes sensitive and is able to understand the identity of that imaginative process.

Can one influence oneself through autosuggestion to get beyond the realm of duality? That would be my question. If the answer is yes, then I would say that autosuggestion is a very powerful thing. If the answer is no, then I would say we should look into the alternative methods which can induce this experience of unity in life. Therefore, you are free to give your own interpretation.

How did kriya yoga first evolve? What should our attitude and approach be to this practice?

The knowledge and the techniques of kriya yoga have travelled from one great mind to the next. Thus it has been refined and made more presentable to the public at large.

Although the kriyas are taught in slightly different ways, they are basically the same. The whole practice of kriya yoga is based on the evolution of energy and matter.

People throughout the ages have been trying to find the meaning of their existence. Those who have found it have given different definitions of their search. Many people believe that the aim of life is to find happiness or perfection, or to evolve, but in yoga and tantra there is a different theory about it. According to the ancient tantric texts, the purpose of human existence is to release energy from matter. Once you have discovered the energy in matter there is no need for anything further, because then you are able to see one law governing everything whether animate or inanimate. To explain this, many Vedas and Upanishads have been written and for attaining this superconscious state and many practices have been discovered. Kriya yoga is one of them.

In this altered state of consciousness you derive more understanding, knowledge and joy out of everything; but in order to achieve it, you will need to follow one system without changing it. Once the practice begins, your personality and consciousness start to mould themselves within the pattern of the practice.

Once, two boys wanted to play a joke on Charles Darwin. They took the body of a worm, and on that they stitched the wings of a butterfly. Then they gave it the legs of a frog. They took this peculiar creature to Darwin and said to him, "Can you tell us to which species this rare something belongs?" Darwin looked at it and asked the boys, "Does it hum?" the boys said "Yes." So Darwin replied, "Well, this is a humbug."

Make sure that you do not make a humbug of your practice. A simple practice, when done by itself, will take you to greater heights than mixing practices and confusing your own pattern of consciousness, thought and personality.

Should we study Vedanta philosophy?

Study any philosophy as long as you are able to understand it. It is of no use to know that you are Brahman until you can

apply it in your life; otherwise it only becomes an intellectual process, intellectual jnana.

In the course of your *swadhyaya*, self-study, take up any book, any philosophy, whether it is Samkhya, tantra, Vedanta, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism or Islam, but it should not be taken at face value. You have to think; you have to rethink; you have to contemplate. One page a day; let that information sink in. According to your understanding, try to find out what it really means.

When you read in Vedanta that the mind is like a cobweb of samskaras, think about it. What is meant by a cobweb of samskaras? Analyze it, side by side with psychology; side by side with your own experience; side by side with what it says further on in the text. Try to understand it as much as you can. This process of analyzing and understanding will develop *viveka*, discrimination.

Understanding takes many different forms. One form of understanding and knowledge is *pramana*, definite evidence; another is *anumana*, what we believe. There are many different forms of understanding and knowledge. Of these, *pramana* is the best: direct evidence. Even if somebody tells you something, try to find out if that is actually a fact. You accept a statement that chocolate is sweet, because it has been someone's experience, and it has been the experience of every other person who has tried it, but you will be more convinced if you try it yourself. If you apply this principle with your study, that will be the true spirit of jnana yoga.

Can you explain how karma yoga relates to the principle of cause and effect, and the role of the witness?

Some people say, "Karma is action." Others say, "No, karma is an archetype of the mind." Both definitions are accepted, but what is the actual concept of karma? The actual concept of karma is that of cause and effect and the doer. There are three principles involved here: karma, the doer, the individual; karma, the action; and karma, the cause. Thus the relationship between cause, effect and the doer is known

as *karma*, and when you look at it with a yogic eye it means having an understanding or a realization of these three principles.

Today we consider karma yoga as the yoga of action. This is all right as far as it goes but it does not really mean that. The aim of karma yoga is not subjugation of the mind, but sublimation of the mind; and it is confined to the mind only, not to spirit. Spirit is beyond the field of cause and effect; it is a state of continuity having no beginning and no end. We can describe individual consciousness as something which has a beginning and an end. Whether you call this individual consciousness or mind, it is all right. I will use the word “mind” in its broad sense as the totality of human experience from the time of birth to the time of death, including our past and future impressions, as there is one element of the mind which is not bound by the concept of time and space.

The mind has been defined as *Jagrīta swapna sushupti turiya*. Yoga says that: the *jagrīta* state of mind is the wakeful state; *swapna*, the dream-like state; and *nidra*, the dreamless state. They are confined by the concept of time and space. However, *turiya*, the fourth state of mind, is not confined by time and space. It is beyond time and space while still being a part of the totality of the mind. Here the mind has two roles: one is a confined role and the other is an unconfined role. In one role the mind works within the boundary of time and space, while in the other role the mind is beyond time and space.

The experience of both aspects of mind, whether we term them as transcendental or material, are either positive or negative; positive in the sense that we like something, negative in the sense that we do not like something. For example, if we sit down for meditation and see heaven and angels, we will like it; but if we see demons and hell, will we like it? No, but why? It is because the intellect has come in between. We accept heaven and angels, but we reject hell and demons. It is our mistake, because both these experiences are coming from the same mind, but it is our nature to accept one and reject the other. Our nature is based on duality: pain

and pleasure, hot and cold, like and dislike, and it is very difficult to be free from this.

In karma yoga, when we attempt to sublimate the mind, we try to take the whole mind from the limitations of time and space and merge it with turiya or the superconscious mind. That is the aim, the method and the purpose of karma yoga. While we are doing this our *samskaras*, *karmas* and all our limitations are involved. It is a great conflict, a great fight. We start the process of karma yoga with work because we are facing karma with a combined sense of cause, effect and the doer.

What is the prerequisite of karma yoga, apart from doing the work? It is to develop the attitude of the observer, the witness, the seer, the *drashta* or *sakshi*, even if you are sweeping the floor. If you do not like it, that is your mind playing its game. If you have to clean the toilets for years and years and years continuously and your mind complains, that is your like and dislike and your mind playing its game. If you find yourself being forced into doing something, then again it is your like and dislike coming into play, your ambitions playing their game. However, the transcendental state of mind is not like that. It has the ability to transform every action into harmony and bliss.

In karma yoga you can eliminate conflicts and establish yourself in *anandamaya kosha*, but is this possible today? It is very difficult because up until now, karma yoga has simply meant to us a method of subjugating the mind, submitting to somebody else's will, which is totally alien to us. This causes great confusion and misunderstanding. We can never submit to anybody's will. However, we are not actually submitting to somebody's will although our intellect says so. Rather, we are submitting to our own whims by not wanting to do a particular work. Our whim is against somebody else's will, "No, I am not going to do it. I don't like it. I hate it; no way can you make me do it. Even if you kick me out of the ashram, I am not going to do it!"

We have to understand this in a different light. Every action is followed by a reaction. We have to learn to accept

both the action and the reaction by learning how to develop the drashta within us, by becoming aware of the observer, the seer inside, in addition to the two types of experience, the seen and the unseen. Then experiences will cease to have any effect on the mind. Just as we can see the effects of something happening around us, in the same way we can also experience the internal, unseen effects of the same events taking place around us, without becoming a victim to them.

A very gross example will convey the meaning. Eating is an external action: hand to mouth, the mouth chewing, and the food being swallowed. Here the external action stops. Then the internal action begins, the process of digestion. How it happens, we do not know. We might be doing anything, sleeping, jumping up and down or travelling, but the digestive process is going on. No matter what you do, digestion goes on and there is no way you can stop it. There is nobody on the planet who can say, "Okay, my food is partially digested; now I'll stop the process of digestion and keep the food in my stomach for another five or six hours."

One is an event over which we have some type of control, the seen event; the other is the unseen event which is taking place and over which we have no control. Do not try to change or control one event if you cannot control and alter the other event at will. This is one major principle of karma yoga, because if you do this, your growth will be lopsided.

The first rule of karma yoga therefore, is to have a proper frame of mind. Observe everything, and then the aspects of *kriya*, action and *karma*, cause, automatically begin to transform themselves. All the causes and effects of karma and samskaras are there; physical cause and effect, psychological cause and effect, spiritual cause and effect, as well as cause and effect which goes beyond the rationality of the mind.

Karma yoga is a process of purging. If you have the doubt, "Why is that person asking me to do this useless job?" Observe it. If you do not want to do it, it is all right. Do not do it, but observe that stage. If you fight with someone, it is all right. Fight, give a slap, left and right, here and there,

but observe it. You should be always observing what you are doing, because only then can you understand the principles of cause and effect, and overcome the duality of mind.

In the *Yoga Sutras* this process is further defined. The second verse is: *yogaschitta vritti nirodhaha* – “Blocking the patterns of mind is yoga.” *Vrittis*, the tendencies or patterns of mind, are of five types, and are painful and pleasurable. If we follow a *vritti* that is painful, we will reject it, if we follow a pleasant *vritti*, we will accept it. Why? Because it suits our personality requirements. It is possible to simply forget about one type of *vritti* and think of the other. Ninety-nine percent of spiritual seekers do it. It is like rejecting hell and the demons, and accepting only heaven and the angels. This happens because we are still in the grip of the *vrittis*, and if we are able to block them, if we are able to sublimate them, then the seer establishes himself in his own nature.

Developing the *drashta* attitude is important. Whether you flunk as a *sadhaka*, *sannyasin* or householder is irrelevant; becoming the witness, however, is of utmost importance in order to establish yourself in your own nature. Try to understand karma yoga from this viewpoint. If somebody asks you to do something, it is not that they are forcing you to do something which you like or dislike, rather it should be taken as an opportunity to observe and reprogram the mind. This reprogramming can only take place when we are able to understand *kriya*, action; *karta*, doer; and *karana*, cause.

What are the different types of mantra?

Mantras are divided into different categories. One category is universal mantras like *Om*, *Om Namah Shivaya*, and *Om Namah Bhagavate Vasudevaya*. The Gayatri and Mahamrityunjaya mantras come in this category and can be chanted either by a single person or by many, to create a positive atmosphere.

In the second category, we have individual or personal mantras, which the guru gives you as per your inner need, for your inner growth or spiritual development. These can

be Shakti mantras for Devi, Ishta, Ganesha, Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, or Vishnu mantras. They can also be abstract mantras which do not represent a deity, but are just sounds.

In the third category, we have healing mantras. These are mantras which, after attaining *siddhi*, mastery, over them, can be transmitted to a sick person in order to cure him. Today, many of these things have been lost from India, but traditionally there were, and still are *ojhas*, traditional healers, who are able to transmit mantras over a distance to help a person who is suffering from a condition, whether fatal or minor.

If you read the tantra shastras, you will find many different categories of mantra in them. There is a very large treatise on mantra called *Mantramaharnava*. It contains the complete principles of mantra and how they work: when to use them; how to use them; how to gain mastery over every mantra; how to determine which is a personal and which is a universal mantra. This is a very vast and separate topic.

What is the yogic concept of creation? How does it relate to Shiva and Shakti?

There is a concept about *chitta shakti vilas*, the play of consciousness. *Brahman*, being a force, comprising consciousness and energy, is subject to movement, both in the dimension of time and space, and beyond the dimension of time and space. The waves in the ocean constantly roll from mid-ocean on to the beach and then recede. Not only on the surface, but underneath also there are currents and eddies.

Now, how are those waves created? Even if you take away all the fish and all type of aquatic life from the ocean, still there will be waves, movement and dynamism. This is the nature of matter. Even in a non-material entity, the same principle will apply, because it is comprised of two forces; and whenever there is a meeting of two forces, there is friction. Even the simple process of moving in slow motion creates friction in the air, no matter how imperceptible it is. Similarly, if a moving object meets another object, there is a noise. You

can move your hand in the air as many times as you like but you will not be able to hear the noise. However if your clap your hands, suddenly you become aware of the sound which is being produced. Of course, this theory is open to discussion, but I think is the best one available today.

The union of these two forces creates waves of expansion and contraction. When there is expansion, there is creation; when there is contraction, there is dissolution. When there is expansion, one manifestation becomes many. When there is contraction, the many become one.

The union of Shiva and Shakti is not the same thing. The concept of Purusha and Prakriti also comes much later. The name is the same, but the manifestation is different. You and your father have the same genes; you are of the same family. You are born out of your father, but still there is a basic difference between you and your father. The concepts of Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti are symbolic, but they also represent the male and female aspects.

In the *Mahanirvana Tantra* the concept and evolution of Shiva and Shakti is explained very beautifully. Shiva is defined in three categories in the form of shiva lingas: *shiva linga*, the dark or gross manifestation of Shiva; *dhumra linga*, the cloudy, subtle manifestation of Shiva; and *jyoti linga* the brilliant, transcendental manifestation of Shiva. Shakti is described in the form of kundalini, in the form of Uma, Durga and Kali. This symbology is very beautiful in the tantric scriptures. Although today, due to our ignorance and lack of understanding, we may look upon it as representing the union between male and female, it is not. It is all symbolic of what happens on the psychic and spiritual level.

What produces the sweetness in the body, that is, the taste in the mouth and the smell of the body during meditation?

You will first have to understand the process of meditation and the various dimensions of consciousness which are related with memory and experience. Point one: we eat, we

taste, we either like or dislike. Point two: the taste is stored in the memory. Point three: the mind develops the capacity to recall that experience. Many times it happens only after much effort and many times it happens naturally. If we want to bring the taste of chocolate or something citric like lemon into the mouth, we can experience that taste if the mind is capable of doing so.

When they are given the practice of *pratyahara*, sense-withdrawal, many people are asked specifically to develop the taste of lemon. All the relevant glands start working and they experience it. However, when you completely cut out the sensory input and output from the brain, you do not experience pain, or the various sensations of the body. You do not hear sounds, you do not see visions and even with the eyes open you are blank. The mind is in a state of nothingness, the state of *shoonyata*. It is a process, a stage of inner awakening.

How does yoga create awareness?

Yoga actually begins with self-awareness. Initially you become aware of the fact that you have a body and a mind, and that you are constantly influenced by your environment, family, society and organization for which you work. These influences can either be positive or negative and you react to the influences either in a positive or negative manner.

Not many people are aware of this process. We take our life for granted; we take our body and mind for granted. We know how to take care of our body, even a tiny cut or a scratch on the body, by immediately applying medication to it. If we have pain in any part of our body, we immediately become aware of that pain and we try to remove it, either by taking hot baths, applying hot compresses, with exercises or medication. However, when something happens to us internally, we are lost. Our consciousness, our mind, feelings and emotions are also subject to cuts and bruises like our body, but what type of medication can be applied to our emotions and to our mind?

The first training that we get in yoga is how to apply this medication, this bandage, to our emotions and mind by becoming aware. Second, we learn how to relax, and then observe our own reactions to the various situations that we confront. In this way we develop our own vitality and creativity, and we find ourselves coming closer to our inner nature. In order to create energy in a rubber band we have to stretch it. When we remove the inertia from the rubber band by the process of stretching, we create activity in it. When we release it there is strength and there is a power; otherwise the rubber band is in a state of complete inertia.

In yoga and tantra the same process is applied to the mind. No matter how intellectual or brilliant we may be, at this moment our mind is in a state of complete inertia, and it only wakes up when we are able to gather all the dissipated energies of the mind. Right now all the energies of the mind are dissipated; we do not know what we are thinking; we are unaware of our feelings and of our environment; we are not aware of the unseen influences or of our sensory perceptions. There is an influx of information which is being received by the mind and senses, but are we aware of them? No, we are not.

Inside, at this moment, there is a process which is programmed: a process of recognition, of elimination and of storing the data which is being fed into the mind. Information is being sent to the brain, but at this moment we are not really aware of it. There are so many sounds, so many noises which we are not aware of until we decide to become conscious of them.

In the practice of yogic relaxation, first we direct our attention outside and become aware of each and every thing which is taking place. Next, we become aware of the information that our body is receiving, that our brain and mind are receiving. With this process of recognition, we can eliminate many of the conscious and unconscious factors which lead to the creation of stress and tension.

In the first verse of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, yoga is defined as: *Atha yoga anushasanam* – “Yoga is a form of

discipline.” Verse two states: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhaha* – “Yoga is a method by which we can block the patterns of the mind.” Verse three states: *Tada drashtuh svarupeavasthanam* – “Then the seer is established in his own essential nature.” He is aware, and from here yoga begins. Asana follows next, then pranayama, the yoga nidra practice of relaxation, meditation, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, karma yoga, mantra yoga, hatha yoga and all the other forms of yoga.

It is suggested that during the kriya course we limit ourselves to necessary interactions. However, I find this particularly difficult because in the evenings after kirtan I feel a desperate need to talk with others. I feel as though I will go mad if I am by myself. Can you explain this?

Why explain this? It happens to everyone. In Christian and Hindu monasteries also you have to face yourself and nobody else, not even a member of the family. Nobody, no blessed face! Just stay there for a while and you will really be able to study your mind.

You see, when you are interacting with people, you cannot study yourself because you are extroverted; because they are engaging you and you are engaging them. However, when you are alone for one hour, two hours, three hours, you can gradually see the functioning and modifications of your mind. Then self-analysis, contemplation and self-investigation become easier.

How can you contemplate if you are not in solitude? A spiritual aspirant must find at least one week in a year to retire into perfect solitude. In fact, the way you are living is not natural. Lead a perfectly natural life. Go somewhere and stay there. Close yourself in the room. Have a small oven or gas cylinder and cook some vegetables for yourself, and then read some nice books. Do asana and pranayama or kriya yoga. Do not see any face, even your own face in the mirror, and you will know a lot more about yourself!

In India the tradition is as follows: in the month of April and also in the beginning of October, Hindus worship *Devi*,

the divine female principle: Durga, Lakshmi and Kali. For nine days they perform uninterrupted mantra japa. They do nothing else but this from four o'clock in the morning. They get up, perform some asana and pranayama and then repeat their mantra: one mala, two, three, four, five, one hour, two hours and then break for half an hour and take a walk. Then again they sit for two hours followed by walking. They take light meals: no grain, no pulses, only fruit, milk, sago, barley, boiled vegetables, etc., for nine days. They do not shave; they do not cut their nails. They sleep on the floor on a blanket or carpet.

Even the very rich people and multimillionaires do it. They do not go to their wives or husbands. They do not associate much with the family. The younger ones look after the family during this period, as well as all the business transactions and everything else. This japa goes on at the rate of nine to ten hours a day, and in what little time they get to relax, they do some spiritual reading, so that it can keep them spiritually alive. After nine days they are back again as normal householders. They shave, cut their nails, change their dress and again return to the mundane world. It depends on them whether they do this in the month of April or October.

Likewise, all of you should do this when the temperature is not too harsh, neither too cold nor too hot, but moderate. Solitude and seclusion for some time is very important for psychological growth. You can even say that it is a psychological healing practice. I agree with you, that if you do this every day of your life you may become abnormal, but as long as you are in the ashram, try to understand the value of this for your spiritual growth, and do your best to follow it.

Has any scientific research been done on mantra?

In 1982 research was done in Barcelona, Spain. One of the swamis from our ashram went there to a hospital where there they hooked him up with the ECD, EEG, GSR and other machines used for biofeedback. The swami chanted the

mantra *Om* for about ten minutes. While he was chanting the mantra, the doctors and scientists monitored his brain waves, his heart activity, pulse rate and body temperature.

There are four brain waves: beta, alpha, delta and theta. In the normal wakeful state of consciousness, beta waves are predominant. In the relaxed state of consciousness, alpha waves are predominant. The scientists found that within ten minutes of the swami chanting the mantra *Om*, the body, the brain and the mind attained a very deep state of relaxation, mental concentration and alertness. Later, research was conducted into various other aspects of mantra. All were found to give similar results: attainment of *shanti*, tranquillity and inner vitality, *shakti*.

Is it true that not only asana and pranayama help to cure various diseases, but also living in the ashram environment, learning to live a simple life and doing karma yoga with the swamis?

Three things are mentioned here: the practice of asana and pranayama; leading a simple life; and doing karma yoga. All three help.

Most of our problems are due to an imbalanced lifestyle; there is some mistake somewhere in our way of thinking, interacting, sleeping and behaviour in general. This also includes hygiene, for if we live unhygienically surrounded by millions of invisible bacteria, there is a greater possibility of our being affected by all kinds of disease.

If we can lead a simple life, then the majority of our problems will simply disappear overnight. Change your way of thinking and fifty percent of your problems will be over. Change your diet; eat according to your stomach and not according to your taste, and forty percent of your problems will disappear. Sleep properly and at regular times. In fact, follow a strict discipline for eating, sleeping, working and playing, and you will always be free from illness, mental troubles and complex problems. The concept of simple living is actually based on common sense.

If a body is already suffering and various internal organs and systems are affected such as the lungs, heart, kidneys, pancreas, liver, gall bladder, intestines, stomach, or others, asana and pranayama will definitely help to reorganize malfunctioning and elimination of any kind of imbalance.

Karma yoga is equally important in maintaining both the stability of the shaven-headed sannyasin and the long-haired householder. Generally, karma yoga is defined as the 'yoga of action', but what type of action? Does it mean work? If it means work, then what type of work? Work that we do in the office or work that we do in the garden or ashram? Does it entail any responsibility and obligation or not? First we have to find out the meaning of karma before we decide to translate karma yoga as the yoga of action. It is definitely the yoga of action and transformation, but not in the sense that we think. It is action in all spheres of existence, and that action entails transformation.

There are actions which we can experience, but there are also actions which we cannot. For example, when we move our hands we create air waves. We are unable to see them but that does not mean that there is no action taking place. If we move our hand in water we will see the ripples being created. We can see them in the water, but not in the air because actions are invisible as well as visible. Our mind, body, emotions and ego perform both types of action; developing the proper attitude towards life, and trying to gain an understanding of both types of action is the purpose of karma yoga. We may begin with hard physical work, no doubt, but that is just a preliminary step, because all physical movement, apart from tiring the body and mind, brings about a metamorphosis within the personality. Initially, it is a physical process of purification: sweating, hypertension of the brain, and stress in the muscles, which will help to remove all types of toxins from the body.

There are two ways of controlling the mind. One is to follow the yamas and niyamas and the other is to simply drop a bomb inside the mind and blow it up. Karma yoga is like

dropping that bomb, because when you follow the yama and niyama initially you utilize your intellect or *buddhi*. In order to practise the aspects of satya, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and so forth, there is initial rationalization of each and every thing, which can become very complicated. However, if we just work and work and work and do not allow the mind to wander here and there, do not give it rest, there will come a time when it will simply go berserk. There will be a lot of agitation.

Many swamis who come to the ashram and have to do a lot of hard work say, “Why do we do so much hard work without gaining anything? There is no source of income, no result. We get up at four in the morning and are told to do this and do that the whole day!” They go through a lot of head-trips. There are many things they do not like and often they do not want to submit to the instructions. Why? It is due to the action of their ego. This is the visible action of their ego. What about the invisible action?

Karma yoga has to be well understood, not as the yoga of action, but as the yoga of rearranging the personality for the better; not as a method of submitting to somebody’s will and desire, but as a method of knowing the visible and invisible actions taking place within the personality. We should become aware of our experiences, whether positive or negative and accept them. With acceptance, the quality and the improvement in our consciousness will definitely be great, whether we be a householder or sannyasin.

For me karma yoga is something very important. I can never forget one day when somebody asked Sri Swamiji, about ten years ago, “Swamiji, people come to you for spiritual development, but I have never seen you give the sadhana of reading spiritual books, or the sadhana of meditation. I only see you giving your swamis very hard work. Why?” Sri Swamiji gave him a reply which will never escape my mind. He said, “My swamis will attain peace of mind twenty times faster than those swamis who do nothing but study and meditate. Why? For the reason that through work they will be exhausting the karma of the body, the

karma of the mind, the karma of the emotions, the karma of behaviour and the karma of the ego.”

Is it possible to work without expectation?

Not in the beginning, but eventually, yes. When we perform an action we expect the result, the fruit, and this result is for our satisfaction. If we work, we want to earn money for our self-satisfaction: to support our family, to get a new car, a new TV, a new fridge, a new radio, and more. There is always an ambition which we want to fulfil, and as long as we want to fulfil our ambition, there is expectation.

For a yogi ambition is not there, so every action the yogi does, takes the form of an experience. If the yogi does or says something wrong or right and you pelt him with stones or with roses, it will simply be an experience. The yogi will not become angry or depressed, but will try not to make the same mistake again. There is no expectation.

The fluctuation of our emotions has to be controlled in order to enable us to develop the attitude of a karma yogi: to try to do each and every action better every time. With practise you can also do it.

Is it a good idea if you are interested, to study other systems such as Tai Chi, macrobiotics, etc., or is it best just to stick to yoga? At what point, if at all, do you need to give up the rest and devote yourself totally to yoga?

Other systems such as Tai Chi, etc. are good, but they deal with only one aspect of the development of body and mind. Tai Chi, for example, deals with pranic awakening and the channelling of energy through physical movement. However, if the practitioner does not know how to utilize that energy once it is channelled, the benefits will be incomplete. It will just have a good effect on the body; you will feel good, happy and healthy, but then what? If you want that internal experience of health, vitality and energy it is okay, you do not come into conflict with any of these techniques. Macrobiotics will help to clean out your system and after the cleaning you

can again involve yourself in eating all the chemical foods, and revert back to the same problem again!

Even though people may not initially take up yoga for spiritual benefits, with the constant practice of asana and pranayama, they will obtain them, even if they just come for therapeutic benefits. The reason is that the practice of asana and pranayama give one the awareness of body, senses, emotions, mind and spirit. Therefore we consider yoga as a complete science, which comprises all three aspects of the personality: head, heart and hands. It is not necessary to give up any other technique if you start the practice of yoga. Rather, I think yoga and other systems can compliment each other very effectively, once you learn how to utilize and direct the energy for your own psycho-physiological growth.

One more thing that I want to add to this answer is that if we study the basic philosophy of yoga, the integrated system of body, mind and spirit will become clear. Take the theory of the koshas for example. The *annamaya kosha*, body, *pranamaya kosha*, energy, *manomaya kosha*, mind, *vijnanamaya kosha*, higher intelligence and *anandamaya kosha*, the state of continuous bliss, are the five areas which can be influenced by the practices of yoga. The other techniques which you are talking about are not as comprehensive as yoga. We do not know of any other system besides yoga which encompasses all these five areas of the personality. That is the reason we call yoga a complete science. It is not a perfect science, it is a complete science; it is only through practise that the sadhaka or spiritual practitioner can make it a perfect science.

If we are just the body, then what is the point of being on earth?

If the body was just the physical body and nothing more, then I would say that this question could become the basis for the next *Bible*, *Bhagavad Gita* or *Koran*. However, there are many other aspects besides the body and we need to learn the lessons of those other aspects, not just of the gross material state we are experiencing now.

Combined with the body is the experience of the mind. You cannot differentiate between the mind and the body; you cannot create a line of demarcation. Remove the mind from the body and what will happen? You will just be a vegetable. Remove awareness from the body and what will be the result? Vegetable life. Remove prana from the body and what will happen? Death.

These are the aspects which yogis and great thinkers have contemplated; that matter is not the ultimate expression of life. Rather, life is a combination of various forces and energies, which become mind, emotions, desires or spirit. All together, these things make up a body. The moment we try to raise our state of awareness in order to discover the mind, we alter our normal state of awareness.

If we try to know what sleep is or what experiences the body and mind have at this time we will discover that there is an altered awareness. In order to concentrate we have to make an effort. The mind concept is there. Similarly with willpower and creativity, the mind concept is there, and behind the mind concept, the energy which moves the mind. The spirit concept is also there.

The philosophies do not say that you have to evolve spiritually. All philosophies actually say one thing: *Atma deepo bhava*, "Be a light unto thine own self." We consider that to be a high spiritual statement. How can I be the light? How can I discover that I am light? How can I light this thousand watt bulb inside me so that I begin to shine? It is a plain concept of simply discovering the relationship or link between body, mind and spirit, which does not necessarily mean that we are going into the dimension of spirit.

As an example, there is a marked difference between the river and the ocean. We are rivers. Just looking at the surface of the river we cannot be aware of the nature of the river itself. We have to discover the different types of current and other qualities, to actually know what a river is. From the ashram we see the Ganga flowing; the concept is there, it is a river. When we go near, we see little waves. When we

go into the water, we feel the currents. As we go deeper into that body of water, our perception of the river changes. It is different from what we have been seeing from afar all our lives. However, just by going into the river I cannot claim that I am in the ocean. In the same way, by realizing the link between body, mind and spirit, I cannot claim that I am escaping from my body into the realm of spirit. It is a different thing altogether.

Beyond the experience of spirit, there is the dimension of spirit. We are simply trying to find out about the unity of the three, which makes me an individual; and as an individual I have certain abilities to express myself, to become creative, to become more functional in the best way I can.

How can we utilize yoga nidra for children?

This is one question which I am not ready to answer, because to play with children and their developing personality is not correct. One needs to understand the procedure of yoga nidra in its entirety and the psychological process involved. In fact, a thorough understanding of child psychology is required. Only when you have the ability to deal with any and every kind of situation arising out of yoga nidra can you become proficient in teaching it to children and using it as a practice which supports the development of their faculties: memory, mind, intellect, emotions and whole personality.

Is sankalpa an intellectual process, or can visualization be used?

In order to make an impression on the subconscious mind, initially we need to understand exactly and precisely what instructions are given. It is true that the majority of our experiences are visual and it is also true that everything which is stored in the subconscious mind is in the form of symbols and pictures. However we are missing one important aspect and that is the filtering of information into the mind through our intellect, through our rationality.

If this filtering did not take place, then our subconscious would be flooded and we would continually be having experiences which we could not handle.

Although the skin is the biggest sense organ of the body, the experience and the information given by the skin is very limited. Auditory experiences are not that important either. Out of all the senses, visual experience is the most important, and our whole interaction with the world takes place through the eyes more than any of the other senses.

Whatever we perceive is filtered through a process of rationality and filed and stored in the form of memories or in some other form which we may not yet know about. Sankalpa works with the rational aspect of the subconscious mind; it does not work with the pictorial or other aspects of the subconscious. Therefore, we say that the sankalpa should be very short, simple and concise so that the mind does not have to filter very much; three, four or five words. The sankalpa will then alter the experience of the subconscious intellect. Although we may consider the intellect to be one, it has branches reaching out to the conscious level, the subconscious level and the unconscious level. This allows for the interaction of the mind and intellect with the objective world.

It is this branching of the intellect into the mental experiences which is the concern of the sankalpa. The intellect provides the verbal form of the sankalpa. The future tense is used because you cannot change the past; it has already happened. You are tired and fed up with the present; that is why you are making the sankalpa. The sankalpa is like a wish for something you want to achieve, not today but definitely in the future. Of course, change in the human personality is not immediate, it takes time.

It is said that we are making fresh karma every moment and that every thought has to materialize. If a person had some thoughts about a realized guru and those thoughts were not fulfilled during that lifetime, would the guru

have to take birth again to fulfil the thoughts of the other person, inducing the cycle of birth and death endlessly?

The concept of karma is a very different concept from the concept of thoughts and feelings, and a difficult concept to understand. Karma has been classified into *prarabdha karma*, karma of destiny, *sanchita karma*, accumulated karma, and many other divisions: individual karma, social karma, global karma and universal karma.

We all create mentally, we all think. However, that does not mean that the person we have thought about is forced to act according to these thoughts and wishes. You come across many people in your lifetime with whom you want to live, study, marry, or just be with. If that is not possible for some reason, what you are asking is, “Does that person again come back as your husband or wife?” If it were so you would have ten husbands or ten wives, because our likes and dislikes change constantly. We think and create situations in our minds; we create karmas and eliminate karmas every moment.

I think this example of a guru is not really a correct one, because if it can apply to a guru, it can apply to your girlfriend and boyfriend as well. It can apply to your father and mother, your son and daughter too, because the feeling is the same. As far as the law of karma is concerned there is a process of elimination. The same is true with thoughts: you think, then you eliminate the thought, it goes away and another thought comes, then it goes away and another thought comes, then another.

If all the thoughts were retained in the mind you would go crazy, because you do not know how to eliminate karmas consciously, wilfully; whether through action, meditation, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga, nobody knows! How is it done? What is the process? What is the system? Internally, something is constantly eliminating, changing and destroying sanchita karma, the karma that we accumulate in our day-to-day life, and it retains only those karmas which affect our life very deeply. Most of the karmas that are related to the empirical objective world, the experience of time, space,

object and senses are easy to eliminate. However, karma which goes beyond the scope of the senses, mind, intellect, emotions, time, space and object is difficult to manage. This is known as prarabdha karma, the karma of destiny.

I am sure that by thinking that you want to study under this guru or the other guru you do not create prarabdha karma. It only remains a thought unless you are powerful enough to bring about a total change in the structure of karma which is related to you and the other person. For that you will need to be either a complete lunatic or a self-realized person, because only these two types of people can do it. People in-between cannot do it.

What is the genesis of individual consciousness?

This can be explained very simply. The sun and the rays of the sun, are they the same? Bubbles in the water and water, are they the same? The rays of the sun are emitted by the sun but they have a different identity. The concept which certain philosophies like Vedanta emphasize is that supreme consciousness is like the sun, and individual consciousness is like the rays of the sun which are perceived differently by different people at different times of the day.

In one sense there is a difference between the rays of the sun and the sun, and on the other hand there is no difference, because where there is light there is bound to be the emission of light. The source which is the centre of all light has the power to radiate light. If we light a bulb, the light will not be confined to the bulb alone but will be perceived and experienced in the whole room. Therefore, if we use this example, individual consciousness is the light which is being emitted from the source of supreme consciousness.

The difference between an ordinary projection of light and the projection of consciousness also has to be understood. In the entire evolutionary process, humans are the only beings who can make an effort to evolve, because the programming of the mind and the intellect is different from other beings. Animals have atma, plants have atma,

insects have *atma* or soul, but they do not have the will to decide their course of action like human beings do. They do not have awareness which can decide and alter the course of events, known as *chitta-shakti* or *satchidananda*. This name is also given to the 'Almighty': *Sat*, meaning Truth; *chit*, meaning consciousness; *ananda*, meaning eternal bliss. Truth is the eternal law which is unchangeable. Bliss is being content with what one is. Chit or consciousness is one aspect of creation which is constantly undergoing change, which is constantly evolving, and which has therefore traditionally been classified into different forms and names like *moola-chetana*, basic consciousness or *jnana-chetana*, which represent different states of evolution.

The word 'chit' in Sanskrit means the aspect of us which is constantly observing, perceiving, analyzing and realizing. It has nothing to do with the other aspects such as *manas* and *buddhi*, mind or intellect. It is the little "I" which is within everybody, and some people say it is the *jivatma*, the individual soul.

Vedanta says that the supreme consciousness is Truth and creation is only an illusion, *Brahma-maya*. These are the two concepts of vedantic philosophy. Now, what is maya? You see yourself in a mirror; the image is there. Are you the person who is here in the body, or are you the person who is being reflected in the mirror? If you identify with the reflected image in the mirror, then that is illusion. That is not reality. If you identify with the one looking at the mirror, that is reality. Somehow, somewhere some mistakes have taken place, perhaps it was a mistake of creation or of God, but you began to identify yourself with the reflected image.

In the first verse of the fifteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* it is very clearly stated that everything belonging to the kingdom of God is topsy-turvy in this material world: *Urdhvamoolam adhahshakham ashvattham prahuravyayam* – "The roots are above and the branches are below." The unmanifest source goes up and the manifest world, the branches, goes down, from transcendental to material. However in this

world everything starts from the bottom and goes up. Thus, according to the vedantic system this manifest world is the mirror image and we have identified ourselves with this mirror image of the supreme reality. We have also been given one blessing, one boon in disguise: through perfection of the self, through perfection of the mind, we can evolve and realize 'That' even though the world is changing.

What is one's lifespan in the world? Eighty or ninety years, on average, and if we consider that we have passed through many millions of years and compare our lifespan with that, it is just like a speck of dust in the ocean of infinity. While we are confined to the limits of the elements and the world, the body and the mind, we should strive to make everything as perfect as possible.

I will give you an example given by our guru, Sri Swamiji. Once somebody asked him, "Is it possible to attain self-realization in this life or not?" He replied, "No, it is not possible to become self-realized in this life or even in many lives. You can be born a million times over but still not attain self-realization." Well, people started to think that what they were doing in life was worthless, hopeless. They thought, "If we are not going to be realized, if we are not going to get anywhere then what is the use of doing all this?" He explained his statement further, "Look, we are trying to understand something transcendental through the agency of the mind and body which are not transcendental. Even if you take birth a million times, you will be under the influence of the same mind, and as long as one has to survive in the world, whether as a householder or a yogi hidden away in some jungle or mountain, you still have to use the faculties of body and mind, and the elements. The purpose of the sadhana which you perform, whether it is yoga or any other type of spiritual pursuit, is not to give you realization, rather it is to make you slowly more aware and transcendental. Then eventually, after you shed the covering of the mind and the intellect, of maya and ignorance, the finite awareness, you can become one with the Supreme."

What is the purpose and procedure of mantra initiation?

Every individual has two lives, one external and social, the other internal and personal. It is the awakening of internal life which is the aim of mantra initiation. The purpose of mantra is to awaken the dormant faculties of the human being: mind, brain and personality. At the time of initiation, along with the aim of achieving mental, psychic, intellectual and emotional balance, all kinds of spiritual experiences which are beyond the grasp of our present day personality can be awakened.

We cannot understand what spirit is without first knowing the basic mechanisms which motivate and direct our activities. Hence, mantra is given according to the state of one's mental evolution and present need. What do we lack in our personality? Do we lack mental peace? Do we lack emotional equilibrium? With the fulfilment of our basic requirements, we simply evolve from individual to universal perception. Hence, the purpose of mantra initiation is to bring about balance and harmony in the worldly and also the spiritual life of an individual.

After initiation, everyone is given a sadhana related to the mantra. A certain number of malas has to be completed at a particular time, in order to create a change in the personality. Mantra is a very individual and private thing. You do not get a diploma that you can go around showing everybody saying, "Look, I have received mantra initiation and from today I'm spiritual." Mantra initiation is a push given in the spiritual direction. The rest is up to you. Personal effort and determination can take you very far.

Modern psychology and psychotherapy are very much focused on childhood experiences and maintain that the patterns created in the early years are responsible for sickness in later years. They believe that one must relive these early experiences in order to break the negative patterns and this is done in primal therapy, psychoanalysis, and other forms of therapy. What attitude

and concepts does yoga have concerning traumatic childhood experiences and traumatic experiences in general?

I will explain by giving you an example concerning one of our swamis. He was suffering from asthma and had tried many therapies without any relief. One day while he was practising some meditation he saw himself as a small child. His parents were both at work, only the housemaid was there. Mealtime had come and he was made to eat something which he did not like. After he saw this his asthma disappeared. He realized that his asthma began because he was forced by that lady to eat something, at a time when he was already feeling the rejection of his parents. That impression later resurfaced as asthma.

Yoga also acknowledges that the basic programming of the mind takes place in the early years. The mind is like a computer which has to be programmed. One needs to give positive input, to feed in uplifting information which will tend to become as powerful as any samskara, and guide the future of the child. In Indian mythology there is the story of Abhimanyu. He learned the science of archery while in the womb, listening to Arjuna as he described the science to his wife. This is just one example of how things influence the child.

A child's mind is like an empty cassette which is left on all the time, and it receives every kind of information, both directly and indirectly. The personality is influenced by the family environment, the behaviour of the parents and siblings, by the social and educational system, and by the thought patterns in the atmosphere.

A child is a psychic being, it is not rational or intellectual. The psychic ability of the child enables it to pick up much more than we are able to pick up, even with our rational mind fully developed. They are very quick. Consequently, yoga holds that, in order to understand our present state, we must also try to understand the kind of childhood we had. This is known as retrospection, going back in time, reliving every kind of experience from the earliest childhood memory until now.

Therapies like the primal scream, psychoanalysis and hypnotism induce a state of mind where one is able to observe situations, events and experiences without having any control over the process, or with a limited degree of control. A hypnotist can take you through regression, but you do not have any voluntary control over that regression. The primal scream therapy can cause one to regress, but here also there is limited control. The experiences attained through the practice of pranayama can also be regressive, and if one is able to follow a system of gradual introspection involving some kind of self-analysis then the experiences, which were once traumatic, will no longer be so.

Experiences which come without your knowledge are traumatic because of your subjective involvement, but if you are objectively witnessing everything so that you are observing the body experiencing as well as the mind experiencing, then the traumatic effect is not there. The consciousness is separated from the experiences of the body and mind. This is the concept of yoga.

Are there yogic approaches which stimulate the education and growth of a child?

Children are greatly pressured to develop their external intellect. They are expected to cram masses of information in a very short time. This so-called 'progressive development' of the intellect in the midbrain stops the absorbent capacity of the psyche. Yoga practices aim to stimulate the deeper mind of the child, and many experiments have been conducted in this area. Many good results have been achieved by combining soft music with pranayama practices. It was found that inhalation can create a spontaneous barrier in the mind, whilst exhalation can leave the mind clearer and receptive to information.

When the child is stressed at the level of the intellect, the mind needs to be directed so the block can be removed. The practices of pranayama, concentration, *trataka*, *yantra* gazing and visualization have been used with positive results.

When children are being educated, there has to be time for some kind of rest; not the general rest and recreation which is given, but rest which can be attained by allowing the mind of the student to focus, and remove any kind of internal, unrecognizable stress symptom. A child cannot define stress; even when grown-ups talk of tension or anxiety, they cannot define something which they are unable to understand and which is totally alien to their nature. As a result, the basic thrust in the yogic system of education has been relaxation and focusing of attention.

How do Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* relate to yoga and hatha yoga?

In his *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali gives instructions on the subtle disciplines of yoga, but he is mainly referring to raja yoga and not to the whole of yoga. He states that before aspiring to follow the principles of raja yoga, the practitioner is required to have attained a certain degree of perfection and coordination of body, mind and spirit. Many yogic scholars believe that the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Shiva Samhita* and many other works dealing with the physical and psychological aspects of yoga, precede the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

Einstein gave the equation $E=mc^2$, which agrees with the whole of physics and mathematics, but in order to understand this simple equation you have to make a full study of mathematics and physics. It is not possible for a layman to understand what $E=mc^2$ means, unless he has the basic understanding of the principles involved in mathematics and physics. This applies to yoga also, and to every yoga practice, whether it is pranayama, asana or meditation.

Patanjali speaks of yama and niyama which are subtle disciplines, but before practising them a certain amount of mental purification, *chitta shuddhi*, and emotional purification, *bhava shuddhi*, is required. In the absence of these two we will be unable to practise yama and niyama perfectly. Socially, we might be able to practise them for a while. For example,

when we talk of *satya*, truth, I may say, "From today I will always speak the truth!" but that is not the concept of *satya*. You might do it for one or two days, one month, a year, or even one lifetime, but will you feel the presence of *satya* within you? No! You might practise *ahimsa*, non-violence, your whole lifetime but that will only be the social concept of *ahimsa*, not the spiritual concept.

The internal experiences of *yama* and *niyama* develop only after your personality has come into harmony with itself, after the mind has developed and evolved to a certain degree. Without that it is not possible. In order to understand this we will have to seek the help of the science of *hatha yoga*.

Hatha yoga is a very basic and simple branch of *yoga*. It is so simple that we misunderstand it. We think that *hatha yoga* means to do something with force. The word *hatha* consists of two parts. The mantra *ha* represents solar energy, and the mantra *tha* represents lunar energy. The purpose of *hatha yoga* is to bring about a balance in the solar and lunar energies of the personality, in the fields of *prana shakti* and *chitta shakti*, which is attained through a process of physiological and psychological purification.

In order to gain control over and develop these two energies, we need to attain a certain amount of perfection and coordination within the physiological system, which will in turn affect the psychological system. This is a very important aspect of *yoga*. We think of the body and mind as being two different things, but in reality they are one entity. They are two different expressions of our personality. It is the exact development of those two aspects of personality which is the aim of *hatha yoga*.

Traditionally, there are only six techniques in *hatha yoga*: *neti*, *dhauti*, *basti*, *nauli*, *kapalbhati* and *trataka*. In the course of time, the practices of *asana* and *pranayama* were included into this science, but originally this branch of *yoga* was comprised of six techniques. The purpose of these is to provide complete harmony between the functions of

the internal organs and systems of the body and the brain; between brain and mind; and between the mind and spirit. This provides the necessary preparation for the eventual practice of raja yoga which leads to the state of meditation, *samadhi*.

Is karma yoga necessary when one is practising raja yoga?

Very necessary. Karma yoga, in the form of hard physical work is necessary to balance the effects of raja yoga meditation. In karma yoga you extend your mind. In raja yoga you withdraw your mind. In bhakti yoga you balance your mind. You are a composition of head, heart and hands; therefore you must have a synthesis of all the yogas initially.

We lead two types of lives, one is spiritual and the other is worldly. Why do we find this difference?

There is no difference between spiritual and worldly life. That is where we make the mistake. If we believe that our spiritual life is our daily life, and that our daily life is our spiritual life, there is no conflict. However, the moment we try to create a division between our spiritual and daily lives – so that in one area of our life we meditate, concentrate, and do yoga, whilst in another area we are slaves of the mind, attached to sensory enjoyment, pleasures, happiness and satisfaction – we are in trouble. We are, in fact, saying, “No, everything about my daily life is false. I have to control myself. I have to control my mind.” We are creating double experiences and that is wrong.

Remove this barrier. Incorporate your daily life into your spiritual life and vice versa, then you will find that the same experience which you have at the time of meditation can be had while walking on the street, talking to someone, or writing something at a table. With your common sense you can remove the barrier and unite both aspects of your life.

What are the main effects of internal and external breath retention on the pranic and mental levels?

Many different types of investigation in Yugoslavian, Czechoslovakian and Eastern European countries have proved that there is a relationship between breath and mind. Furthermore, there is a definite relationship with the consciousness at the time of every inhalation and exhalation, and at the time of every internal and external retention.

When we inhale we build up resistance. Physiologically, we build up resistance in the nervous, muscular and circulatory systems, and in the brain. There is a state of alertness. When we exhale, this resistance slowly dissipates and there is the experience of relaxation. When we hold the breath in, there is expansion of the pranic field within the body and the electrical emissions from the body; you can see this form in the Kirlian photographic system. After internal retention, the electromagnetic field of the body increases greatly, and after exhalation the same field contracts. Consequently, even the pranamaya kosha undergoes the same experience of expansion and contraction as the physical body at the time of pranayama.

In the mind also, you create and reduce resistance. Now, how can all this be monitored? There is one simple experiment you can try. Fall into a rhythmic pattern of breathing and have somebody repeat a sentence to you at the time of inhalation and another sentence at the time of exhalation. You will remember more clearly the sentence repeated at the time of exhalation, because you absorbed it more easily due to the lower resistance of mind, intellect and body.

There are many new systems developing around the world for accelerating learning. Yoga nidra, especially in the training of children, has been utilized by Sri Swamiji very effectively. He used the technique of telling the practitioner to observe the breath, the time of retention, the time of exhalation, the relaxation of the body and the state of the mind, and then giving the instruction.

This technique of yoga nidra is utilized a great deal for training the inner mind, the unconscious and the subconscious mind, because the mind as a whole is a form of energy related with pranamaya kosha. It has a separate identity but the two are interlinked. Through pranamaya kosha you influence the mind and through manomaya kosha you influence the pranic field.

In summary, the internal and external retention expand and contract the pranic field, and increase and decrease mental or intellectual resistance. If you incorporate the practice of pranayama before yoga nidra it lowers the emotional resistance, and in this way you can reprogram your mind more effectively.

You have said there are two types of guru. One is the actual physical form of a man or a woman, the other is the internal guru. What is the difference?

In every phase of life we need guidance if we are new in that particular area. A child goes to kindergarten, primary school, secondary or high school, college, university, etc. At every stage there is a teacher who can develop certain intellectual knowledge within the child. For example, a guru of mathematics, physics or botany.

In spiritual life also, a guru is necessary because it is an area of life in which we need to establish ourselves. If, with the help of the external guru, you are able to awaken your internal guru, then the work of the external guru is finished. From that moment the internal guru takes over and guides you. This internal guru is intuitive power and common sense.

What is diksha?

The word diksha comes from the root *dik*, which means to see. *Diksha* means to make the path, system or goal visible. We see this goal in the awakening and discovery of energy and the Self. Diksha is directed towards that discovery.

There is *sparsh diksha*, diksha by touch; an enlightened being touches you and you are transformed. There is *drig*

diksha, diksha by sight; somebody looks at you and you are transformed. There is *mantra diksha*, diksha of sound and vibration in which you repeat the name of God, *nama-smaran*, and through sadhana you are able to transform yourself.

There are many forms of diksha. Some are known as shaktipat, some are known as guru's grace, and some are known as God's grace.

Do we need to alter our personality type in order to reach our goal?

We can modify our behaviour, but from my understanding of yoga, I do not think it is necessary for us to alter, change or influence the personality in any way. Rather, we should enhance the qualities that already exist in order to attain the desired goal and direction in life.

The whole process of sadhana is geared in this direction, for so-called 'normal' people. What is normal? Some place in-between abnormal and super-normal. Unless we are extremely influenced by a particular mood, attitude or view-point which needs to be changed, we can simply follow our personality type, enhance it and achieve the process of 'becoming' and the process of 'being'.

In the case of criminals, cut-throats, murderers and abnormal people like that, the attitude has to be changed; their expression has to be changed. For a drug addict similar changes will have to take place. A person who is hyperactive or hypoactive will also need to change.

I want to know about personal vitality. Does it vary from time to time according to different situations?

We consume *prana shakti* or vital energy every moment of the day and as it is consumed we become depleted, and by the end of the day our brain has stopped functioning. If you work really hard, at the end of the day you do not want to do much head-work.

When I was in Australia, a doctor, an artist and I decided to do some research into Kirlian photography. Every

morning for one month, as soon as we woke up, we took photographs of our hands. The emission of energy was about one inch in diameter. Then at the end of the day we re-took the photographs. By the end of the day the print of the psychiatrist's hand showed absolutely no emission. When we asked him how he felt he would say, "Exhausted!" Throughout the day he had been constantly talking, utilizing his energy, tiring himself mentally, emotionally and intellectually. The artist, who used to do oil-painting all day, felt tired after concentrating all day, but his mind was free from involvement with physical work, interaction with others and mental conflict. Only his concentration was affected. After he took his energy print, if he lay down for about fifteen minutes his vital energy would come back to the same strength as in the morning. In my hand it would remain the same, because I was involved in teaching yoga. I used to practise yoga in every class while demonstrating, so there was constant activity. Of course, my energy used to become depleted, but it used to recharge itself again very fast.

If you practise yoga, you will always feel that there is a certain vitality within you. We used to try different exercises: asana, pranayama, mudra, relaxation, concentration and see how fast the energy could be increased by doing the different practices, not only physiologically but also mentally. We found that the practices of pranayama were the most effective for gaining a rise in the level of vitality.

Thus, we use up our pranic energy during the day, and when we cannot again fill the pitcher with prana we feel emptiness, tiredness or even exhaustion. However, if we can learn how to relax and breathe correctly, and practise yoga, we can quickly raise the vital energy level again.

How can we distinguish a disease which has arisen out of the practice of kriya yoga from an ordinary disease?

It is very difficult to decide, and this is where the guru comes in. It is the guru who can ultimately decide whether the disease or the problem is psychic or physical. If one

follows the instructions of the guru exactly then there may not be any problem, because many illnesses originate from the psyche. This is an area which requires the attention of a person who has expert knowledge about the practices and the process of awakening.

Problems due to the practices of kriya yoga will never begin instantaneously; they will take time to manifest in their full glory, and by the time that happens, you will be well aware of the problem. First, have it checked by the medical doctors; get their advice, their treatment, and after doing that, if you still find no relief, you can try other yoga practices. If, even through yoga, you do not find any relief, the guru's advice should be sought and mind you, it really works.

A man came here in 1986, suffering from hypertension. He walked up to Sri Swamiji and said, "Swamiji, I have hypertension." Sri Swamiji asked, "How much?" He said "Oh, it's about 200/150", you know, the extreme, anything more and there would have been ruptures in the brain cells, flooding of the brain would have occurred. Sri Swamiji told him, "Do *sirshasana*, the headstand, it will be okay." Those of us who were sitting there thought, "Headstand! How can Swamiji tell him to do the headstand?" After a week the man walked in and said, "Swamiji, normal BP." So, you see, there are things like this which go beyond normal rationality, and the guru's guidance is necessary in such cases.

Does the guru communicate internally with the disciple?

The guru has the capacity to communicate internally with disciples who have opened up their channels. If your internal radio is off, however, you will not pick up any station. No matter how intense the emissions of telepathy may be, you will not be able to receive a message coming to guide you. You will think it is all due to the fantasy of your mind. The sincere sadhakas have the capacity of receiving his transmission, and this has been experienced by a number of disciples who have been able to turn on their radio and tune in to 'Guru band'.

Is it possible for human consciousness to be born again as an animal?

Yes, it is possible. I do not have any practical experience, but I can assure you that, according to the various schools of thought, such a thing is possible. For this reason, in ancient traditions, techniques have been prescribed for the time prior to the final departure, but we have forgotten this protocol. In the Tibetan culture, there is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which tells one how to die. In the tantras, there is meditation for the time of death and dying. In Samkhya philosophy, we find meditation at the time of *maha prayana*, death. In the vedantic system, we find meditation which alters the state of mind and perception.

The one purpose of all these practices is: our minds should not be attached to the world of matter, the world of time and space at the time of death, because this attachment can cause the consciousness to regress from higher to lower levels. Attraction towards the world is always very powerful. There are many stories relating to this in the scriptures. Attachment can delay the progress of the soul; spirits are bound to this plane because they are attached. These spirits are bound by their emotional attraction for something in the material world, usually the family. However, spiritually awakened people or yogis, have only one idea in their minds, “Every butterfly was a worm once upon a time. I am a worm right now but I will become a butterfly.”

Why does creation exist? How is it that the individual soul, which comes out of perfection, has to accumulate karmas just to work them out to become perfect again?

Any discussion on this topic can only be theoretical and philosophical, and coming from the intellect, it will therefore not be accurate. We are talking of something which is beyond the grasp of human perception and imagination. We can talk about soul, we can talk about creation, but will we be able to use that as practical experience in life? No. Our first effort has to be to develop transcendental

awareness. Naturally, once we have this type of awareness we will not need to discuss it.

What are ‘atma’ and ‘samadhi’?

They are abstract terms for a state of experience which is at present beyond our reach, and in fact, at this stage of the game the less you know about them the better, because I think it will just create more confusion in your mind. Understanding atma and samadhi is not that easy. We can give a broad definition that *atma* means soul, or that *samadhi* means self-realization, but even according to yogic theory the definition of samadhi changes depending on our state of evolution.

In the yogic tradition, eight different kinds of samadhi have been defined, and the same applies to atma, because atma is not an entity which we can perceive through the senses, mind or intellect. It is a state of evolution of consciousness combined with the rise of energy, which leads to different experiences of atma.

I would not try to define these two things. The only suggestion I can give at this stage is that you concentrate on the direction in which you want to go. Make every effort to move in that direction, and if something is meant to happen, it will happen.

Can chanting mantras solve problems of government and science?

Mantras are combinations of sounds which influence our psyche. In transcendental meditation and in japa yoga you use a mantra. When you chant a mantra constantly, you are automatically influencing your psyche, which in turn creates a change in your outlook, because it develops your creative intelligence. Now, whether governments can find solutions to their problems or not is irrelevant. The good news is that once you have developed this type of elevated mind, you will be able to find the solution to any problem. Any X, Y or Z person will find the solution. This can happen to anyone.

As we evolve, our genetics change. Although the basic structure does not change, the quality changes and the composition of energy changes. As we evolve even more, we will also undergo certain physiological changes. We do not know whether Darwin's theory of evolution is correct or not, because there are many such theories, but it is widely accepted, as it is considered the most scientific. If that theory is correct then millions of years ago we would have been very different from what we are today. Gradually, over a period of time we have changed. The level of consciousness became different within us. The level of performance and action has changed, and at present we are also undergoing a change.

People today are becoming more open and receptive to different ideas about self-development, and if this continues then there may come a time when science will be able to produce realized persons. However, in order to develop certain transcendental qualities we need to have a transcendental mind.

In order to develop a transcendental mind we need to utilize certain practices which, in themselves, are transcendental, and which can take us to that particular stage of life. For a long time, effort will be required in order to achieve that transcendental state. When scientists experience the transcendental mind and are able to experiment with it, then they might be able to create a transcendental personality.

After the experience of divine light at the eyebrow centre, and hearing divine sound, what is the next procedure?

The human personality is composed of energy or *prana shakti* which, in its different manifestations, provides an insight into various dimensions of consciousness. This insight into new areas of the personality and the utilization of our inner faculties is the aim of yoga.

Every kind of pranic experience carries with it an audible, a visual, a tactile, an olfactory, and a gustatory experience. Just as we talk about divine sound or divine light, in the

same way, there is also the experience of divine fragrance and divine touch. It is quite a common experience. In fact, this is the purpose behind the process of *shaktipat*: the direct transmission of energy from one person to another, whether by touch, sound, fragrance, or any other way.

If it happens spontaneously, it only does so after the aspirant has progressed up to a certain point. There are many streams which cross the road, and as you start walking, you cross one stream, then another and another. Just by standing in one place, one does not cross all the streams that pass across one's path. The progress which is behind sadhana is the main factor here, which also ensures that there is a kind of positive and creative psychic attitude, a mental and psychic purification, and very rarely is there any kind of regression from that stage.

If, by chance, one has the vision of divine light, or of divine sound, touch, fragrance, or taste, it means that the consciousness has already evolved to a point where it is experiencing on a different dimension. If one is leading the life of a renunciate, sadhu or sannyasin, who does not have any kind of worldly or social attachments or involvement, one can continue to stay in that same state of consciousness, which will eventually lead to the experience of samadhi. However, those people who have obligations, who have responsibilities and commitments, are automatically pulled by the extroverted nature of the *ego*, self-identity, or by the mind, and the link is broken.

Sound, in yogic terminology, is known as *anahada nada*, the unheard or unstruck sound. The light in yogic phenomena is known as *darshan*, a visual impression or contact. According to the theory of yoga, as the consciousness evolves from one stage to the next, it experiences different kinds of sounds and visions; and this has also been described in the science of kundalini yoga. If you look at the physiology and description of the chakras, each has a corresponding colour which represents the spectrum of light, sound, smell, taste, touch and many other different elements associated

with it. This includes the deities, which are the positive and negative qualities in the form of angels and demons.

All this transpires with the awakening of prana. In order to describe the awakening of a chakra, let us consider the chakra as being like a room, having many windows representing the petals. Each window represents an entry and exit point of pranic energy. If prana is flowing through one entry, channel or *nadi*, into the chakra, the areas around that flow will be affected more than the areas which are at a certain distance from it. These different entry and exit points in a chakra correspond to different mental and emotional states, different behaviour patterns and deep-rooted impressions in the form of samskaras and karmas.

If, for example, my mooladhara chakra is activated by the flow of prana from one nadi, and that nadi controls the centres of the psyche, the unconscious fears, inhibitions, complexes, deep-rooted ambitions, and then that will be the area which I will begin to experience most. If the flow of prana is from another channel, then I might experience something totally different, because that area controls the feeling or the expression of harmony, love, universality, compassion, and so forth. While I am having all these different experiences in mooladhara chakra, I will also be aware, due to the sensitivity of my consciousness, of certain sounds and visions.

It may happen naturally that I am sleeping and suddenly, in the form of a dream I have a vision; or that I am meditating and I have a vision; or that simply while sitting I might smell something, but when I search for that smell I do not find any source for it. This happens to many people; suddenly they smell fragrances in meditation and do not know the source of them. At times they hear music, an actual orchestrated piece of music, but do not know where it is coming from. Similar things happened to me when I used to practise sadhana: hearing music in the middle of the desert with nobody around for miles and miles, the car radio and everything off, just music floating in the air; or seeing different kinds of light when there was absolute darkness, actual light, not just my imagination.

I used to ask Sri Swamiji, “What is this? Why does it happen?” From what he said, I’ve understood that they are all experiences of prana and they change, but when the final experience of prana takes place, in the sahasrara region, there is no coming back. No matter who you are, even if you are the prime minister or the president of some country, with all your obligations, there is no returning. One’s consciousness merges totally with that experience. The consciousness has evolved through the different areas of the mind, beyond the emotional, intellectual, and other structures of the mind. You have transcended the intellect, transcended the ego, so at the end there is no coming back; there is nothing which can pull that awareness back to the gross nature.

If you have heard that divine sound, or if you have seen light, and you have again returned to being what you are, it is simply an expression of pranic energy on the level of evolution which corresponds with that chakra. I might be at the level of mooladhara, you might be at the level of anahata; everybody has a different chakra functioning or awake. When the mind becomes extroverted, any experience simply remains in the background. If you see light and you come out again, or if you only see it sometimes, then the way to progress is to continue with the sadhana which you have been practising until now. Gradually, that will increase the sensitivity of the consciousness, and in the course of time, when there is awakening at sahasrara, when the ‘atomic explosion’ takes place, then it will be a full display of sound, light and colour, and from there, there is no coming back.

Can I practise shoonya meditation during pregnancy?

Yes, it will make you more in tune with the baby and will help provide it with better samskaras. One of the difficulties in providing good samskaras and karmas to our children is that our own mental conflict, involved as we are with our desires, emotions, karmas and samskaras, does not enable us to give positive direction to the minds of our children. However, if

we can just forget our mind, conflict, ego, desires, ambitions, and so on, during shoonya meditation, it will allow for the proper development of the child's consciousness, for its own spontaneous, natural development.

In pain and sorrow there is personal growth. Can the pain be self-inflicted?

I tend to disagree with this idea of growth in pain and sorrow. There is no personal growth in pain and sorrow, neither is there personal growth in happiness and joy. It all depends upon one's attitude. One's angle of vision has to change, and once you are able to change your angle of vision, every experience in life becomes a qualitative experience, whether it is of pain or pleasure.

Generally people say that pain is good because it helps us to overcome our limitations, and that suffering is good because it helps us to understand ourselves better and change our angle of vision. The change in one's vision of the world is an aid to personal growth, not the actual pleasure and pain.

Some sadhakas inflict a lot of pain on the body. In the yogic system this is known as *tapasya*. Sadhakas sit on a bed of nails and meditate, stand in cold water in the coldest months of the year, or light four fires around themselves in the middle of summer, *panchagni tapasya*. All this sadhana is traditionally practised in order to develop an awareness of one's physical ability and to gain control over the involuntary mental and physical movements of body and mind. After attaining these preliminary stages of *tapasya*, one enters into the spiritual dimension, where *tapasya* takes on a different meaning.

If somebody pinches you hard, what do you think at that time and how do you react? You do not accept it. Why can you not accept the pain at that time? Why do you want to reach out and prevent it? If you could just accept it then it would mean that you have control over the body and mind. There would then be no search for pleasure, either for the body or the mind. There would be no inducement

of the innate tendency for self-satisfaction, and this would represent a kind of mental or psychic strength, a change in the usual angle of vision.

We call it *yoga nidra*, psychic sleep, but there should be no *nidra*, sleep, while practising. Sri Swamiji educated you through ‘*nidra*’ only, not ‘*yoga nidra*’. Could you tell us about that?

It is suggested that one does not sleep during *yoga nidra*, although the actual meaning of *yoga nidra* is psychic sleep. It means that our conscious intellectual mind disappears, our subconscious mind becomes active and our unconscious mind merges with the subconscious, and there we have no concept of time and space. In *yoga nidra* we withdraw the activities of the conscious mind, and retain the consciousness in the subconscious area of the mind.

This is similar to the state of drowsiness that happens just before we fall asleep. Many times during the practice of *yoga nidra* you find that you are not asleep, but that you miss some instructions. Although you may be listening attentively, for a second or so you will miss the instructions. When you become aware of that missing second or so, that is the state of *yoga nidra*.

Frankly speaking, I have no recollection of ever practising or learning through *yoga nidra*, because I used to be fast asleep. I was only seven or eight, but from what I have heard, Sri Swamiji taught me languages, scriptures, philosophies and sciences while I was fast asleep. I recollect reading books once only and having the feeling that I had read them before somewhere, for example, the *Bhagavad Gita*. The first time a person handed me the *Bhagavad Gita*, I read it and felt as if I had already read it before! I knew what was written in it! That type of feeling I have been aware of many times. Even now when I read a book, which to my conscious mind is for the first time in my life, I know its contents. That type of feeling has come up and Sri Swamiji says that it was done by teaching me through sleep.

What is the meaning of the sloka, *Apane juhvati pranam* in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:29)?

It is a very interesting question. In this verse Sri Krishna is talking to Arjuna about the benefits of yoga sadhana, and of the awakening of prana and apana shakti. If you study yoga you know that the whole spectrum of pranic energy is divided into five sub-energies. *Prana* is the life energy. In fact, it is not known as prana, but rather as *mahaprana* which is in every manifest part of creation whether animate or inanimate. The energy which pervades matter, metals, stones, vegetable life, human life and animal life is the manifestation of mahaprana. Within the body this mahaprana is divided into five sub-pranas known as the *pancha vayus*, five vital airs.

These five pranas are located as follows: *prana vayu*, between the throat and the cavity of the ribcage; *apana vayu*, between the navel and the perineum; *samana vayu*, above the navel and below the diaphragm; *udana vayu*, in the extremities i.e., legs, arms and head; *vyana vayu*, pervading the whole body. Out of these five, the most important are prana and apana.

In the process of the manifestation of energy in the form of matter, these two pranas move in opposite directions. Prana vayu, which is located between the ribcage and the throat, is an upward-moving energy, and apana vayu, located between the navel and the perineum is a downward-moving energy. Apana is responsible for procreation, progeny, and digestion, conversion of matter into energy, in the form of the food that we eat, digest and then distribute throughout the body and convert it in to energy for strength, stamina, health and vitality. Prana vayu, located in the chest region, is responsible for the activity of the lungs, the breathing process, the activity of the heart, the circulation of blood, and controls the major centres of the autonomous nervous system.

In the classical texts on yoga such as the *Yoga Sutras*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gherand Samhita*, it is said that a yogi in the process of sadhana, in the process of perfection, reverses

the flow of prana and apana. Prana, which normally flows up begins to flow down, and apana which normally flows down, begins to flow up. They both merge and meet at manipura chakra. When these two pranas merge in manipura, one attains immortality. This is a statement of the yoga shastras.

The description by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* is very simple. He is describing this actual process, *Apane juhvati pranam*. *Apane* means the apana vayu, *juhvati* means merging, and *pranam* means prana vayu – "When the apana energy merges with the prana energy or vice versa, that is a state of yoga." It is a state of pranayama, *Pranayama tathapare*.

Cessation of the normal movement of prana is classified according to the yoga shastras as the fourth type of pranayama. In his *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali talks of four categories of pranayama which are not the practices of inhalation and exhalation, although they may be compared to that. He talks of *puraka*, inhalation, as one form of pranayama, *rechaka*, exhalation, as another, and *kumbhaka*, internal and external retention as the third. Total cessation in the movement of prana throughout the personality is the fourth type of pranayama, which is attained only by the yogis who have performed a lot of sadhana and achieved a state of perfection.

Inhalation here does not mean the inhalation of breath. Looking at it from the yogic point of view, right now all our energies are dissipated. All our pranas are moving in different directions, without any control. This uncontrolled, dissipated movement of prana creates physiological and psychological imbalance which we experience in the form of ill health, disease, physiological and psychological problems, conflict and tension. Inhalation of prana means making the pranas flow in one direction; exhalation means making them flow together in a different direction, not one at a time. Kumbhaka means being able to retain the prana within the body, and not allowing it to be discharged. What Krishna is talking about in the *Bhagavad Gita* is the process of sadhana which is specifically designed for a highly evolved sadhaka.

Is it necessary to wear geru clothing while staying in the ashram and is there an effect in wearing geru?

No, it is not necessary. It is up to you. Of course, when you put on a uniform, automatically there comes a sense of discipline and responsibility. For example you might be a policeman. In ordinary clothes you do not behave like one, but when you put on your uniform suddenly your whole attitude changes. The idea comes, "I am representing the law." It is the same with geru.

You might be a swami regardless of whether you wear the clothes or not. In an ashram where there are a hundred people living, all wearing geru, then by wearing it you also absorb their vitality, their determination and inner sense of discipline and action. You become part of them. It is a fusion of the external personality, an identification, which takes place whenever you put on any kind of uniform. It is not a must, however. You are free to choose.

Can bhakti yoga work for non-believers?

Bhakti yoga has only one philosophy for its followers and it is that you fix your mind on the image which you have taken as your symbol; merge yourself with that and let the identification become so powerful that there is no turning back. For the other group of people who lack faith, belief and confidence, bhakti yoga says that by channelling the emotions into a sadhana which has been prescribed with a mantra, by channelling the emotions and will, one can experience divinity. An internal evolution will take place if you believe; if you do not, then use the mantra. Both roads are going in the same direction.

How can mantra be explained and what is the difference between a 'mantra' and a 'maha mantra'?

There is no difference. The purpose of mantra is to raise the level of consciousness and any and every mantra is capable of doing that. We cannot say that one mantra is better than another or that the benefit of one mantra is greater than another. If we think like that we are wrong.

Mantra has been defined as an energy which can raise human consciousness and liberate the mind from the bondage of the gross dimension. It instils a higher spiritual awareness in the practitioner. Every mantra is equally powerful. Mantra is given according to the stage of evolution in which we find ourselves. It works on the level of vibration which can awaken the dormant and subtle psychic centres within the body, and within the total human personality comprising mind, intellect, emotion, and more.

When we chant a mantra, it is not just monotonous repetition of some incomprehensible sound. It creates sound vibrations which are related to the different psychic centres or chakras. Some people think that mantras are religious, but this idea is wrong.

If you study kundalini or kriya yoga, you will know that different sound frequencies can stimulate different chakras. There are bija mantras or seed sounds. *Om*, for example, is the seed sound of ajna chakra at the eyebrow centre. Other mantras represent different frequencies pertaining to the level of our inner consciousness. With the repetition of a mantra we are raising and transforming our inner consciousness. No mantra is greater than another; they all belong to the same category.

You have mentioned that one must develop the attitude of an objective observer, *sakshi*, to one's own actions. I would like to give you an example: a heart surgeon, performing a delicate heart operation on a young child, feels pity for the child and develops an attitude of attachment. Is it right or wrong, and is this process of attachment deviating from objectivity?

That is not attachment. That is an experience of love and dedication. Attachment is something different, and if you are dedicated to a cause you will find that you develop a spontaneous love which is not really attachment. Suppose the surgeon is operating on the child and he is attached, and the child dies on the table. Who will feel it more, the surgeon

or the parents? The surgeon will of course feel it because it represents failure of his ability, but he will not suffer for as long as the parents of the child. They will suffer for years together; the surgeon will only suffer for a period of days or weeks.

Attachment is a very deep emotional link which, according to psychology and yoga, is very hard to break. When this link breaks, there is a very big conflict, as was the case with Arjuna on the battlefield. When Arjuna saw his father and mother, grandfather and aunts and uncles, there was a very deep emotional link. He had lived with them, he had played with them, and he felt it.

When you are performing an action, you should have the attitude of a seer or observer, *drashta* or *sakshi*, but if you are perfect in your action you will have dedication, and with dedication you will have automatic love.

Do the mind and intellect help us to transcend the mind or are they barriers?

Both. They will help you to transcend. They will help you gain a deeper understanding and insight, and they will expand the horizons of your consciousness, but the intellect is limited, the mind is limited. It is not possible to understand something which is infinite and transcendental through a finite mind and intellect. The intellect cannot be considered as being infinite. Our present mind cannot be considered as being infinite. The quality has to change. The mind has a form, the intellect has a form, emotions and thoughts have a form, and you have to learn how to get beyond the form of the intellect, mind, thoughts feelings, emotions, desires and ambitions. On one side, the mind and intellect can elevate you to great heights and on the other, they can give you a big slap on the face. At least, that has been my personal experience.

One thing which can transform the mind and the intellect is simplicity in life, simplicity of mind and simplicity of intellect, not complexity. Complexity of intellect and mind is good in order to come to a point of realization, but then simplicity of mind and intellect is necessary to experience

and live that realization. This is what we try to do through every kind of yogic sadhana. We utilize the principles of viveka, vairagya, jnana yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, laya yoga, nada yoga, every kind of yoga, in order to create an expanded field of perception, but finally we have to set these aside and simply go forward with basic common sense. That is known in my dictionary as transcendence.

Why is the title ‘Swami’ given?

You are given the title of ‘Swami’ because in your own small way you have to develop the attitude of a sannyasin, the idea of *seva*, selfless service, of *swadhyaya*, self-study and *sadhana*, self-practice. Saraswati is the family to which you belong, and you are what is between ‘Swami’ and ‘Saraswati’.

What role does desire play in evolution? Can we liberate ourselves from it?

There are three faculties in every human being known as *iccha shakti*, *sankalpa shakti* and *kriya shakti*. Every creature in creation is motivated by his or her desires, and it is the desire which gives that person or creature the will to act, to think and to move. In the absence of desire one cannot become anything. Desire has two aspects: one is the positive desire, which is conducive to the development and growth of the total human personality; and the other is negative desire, which is detrimental to expression and growth.

The yoga shastras say that negative desires are the *bahya vrittis* which direct our attention and perception to the gross material plane, inhibiting the expression of the faculties and energies which are inherent within us. Concurrently, the *antar vrittis*, the subtle desires or motivating force is a type of energy which is conducive to the attainment of perfection.

Our whole life revolves around desire. Desire is represented by *iccha shakti*, “I want; I desire to have it; I wish to possess it.” When we set our will on the attainment of a particular desire, then it takes the form of *sankalpa shakti*:

one-pointed awareness, one-pointed desire, and one-pointed will. Finally, the force which enables us to carry out the achievement of our resolution, the motivating process, is known as *kriya shakti*.

In the course of human evolution the gross desires distract the individual from the achievement of perfection. Yoga says that perfection is the result of the ultimate union between the faculties of body, mind and spirit; the union of individual atma with *paramatma*, supreme soul. Our positive and negative desires are the attributes which give us the experience of 'being here now'. I may like something, I may dislike something; you may like something, you may dislike something; you accept something, you reject something; that is the general trend. There comes a time when we realize that this is happening to us and we make an effort to sublimate gross desire, *bahya vritti*, into the experience of *antar vritti*, subtle desire. At this changeover point, the journey into spiritual life begins. We can transform this particular *vritti* which is at present extroverted, and try to make it introverted, more subtle and aware.

Patanjali, in his very first yoga sutra proclaims, "*Atha yoga anushasanam*." *Anushasanam* is a disciplined life, an organized structure of living. Yoga goes one step further by saying that this discipline represents total control over the deep, subtle aspects of personality. Just as we discipline the body and mind, we also have to discipline the faculties and energies which lead us to the realization of spirit.

We have learned how to discipline the body up to a point, but many people do not have any discipline by which they can raise and control the level of energy, or bring about a balance in the physiological structure. The physiological structure in itself lacks discipline. We try to discipline the mind but we are not able to.

How does one discipline the mind? It is through the mind that you seek contentment; it is through the mind that you analyze pain and suffering, or wish for peace, quiet and happiness. If you get a desire to control your mind, just think

for a second where that desire is being generated. Is it being generated by some other aspect which is not the mind? No. It is being generated by the mind. How can the mind control itself? It lacks the discipline to control itself. How can you control the totality of the mind-field when you cannot even control one particular thought, feeling, emotion or desire; when you cannot even change your own behaviour?

There is a Sanskrit verse: *Mananath trayate iti mantraha* – “The method to liberate the mind is through the practice of mantra.” Those people throughout history who have repeated mantras have been able to completely transform themselves and also those who come under their influence. You know the kirtan, “Hari bolo, Hari bolo, Hari bolo”? We think it is the name of God; but the name of God is a mantra which represents a particular quality. If it did not represent a particular quality, then Valmiki would still be a thief and not a saint. If you say “Rama, Rama, Rama” day in and day out what do you get? A transformed personality! It transforms your thinking. It transforms your total behaviour, energy and consciousness.

Our negativity, pain and suffering still persist. The desires, ambitions, needs and weaknesses are still within. That happens because we have not practised our mantra in the form of sadhana as Valmiki did. Sadhana does not just mean something that you practise. *Sadhana* means something that you perfect. *Siddha kar lena*, something which you perfect. A sharpshooter can hit the bullseye straight in the centre because through practice, he has refined his concentration to such a degree that for him hitting a target is effortless. Conversely, the aim of those people who have not had any practise will be very erratic and unsteady; it will not come near the bullseye. We have the ‘gun’, the mantra, and we have been told to ‘fire’, to practise, but how can we hit the bull’s-eye if our mental faculties are dissipated and we do not have one-pointed concentration?

There are people who have achieved this perfection in sadhana, and when we come in contact with such people

the core of our being is transformed, just by being in their presence. Accordingly, if you wish to liberate yourself from desire and open up your entire personality, sincere and regular mantra sadhana is essential.

Recently I had very strong emotional experiences due to the death of a child, and then the burial of another person today. For a whole year, I have experienced grief. Is that really the highest degree of pain one can ever experience in life? Yet, the funeral was like a consolation, a beautiful experience. As we had been so involved with the child we were the only ones who did not cry. It was like we had done enough, we could not give any more, and we went beyond that. It was a beautiful experience of detachment. Is that part of the anahata chakra that was being activated?

Answering the first part of the question, no, the highest degree of pain can shatter the soul.

I thought I was shattered.

But you are here now!

But the whole family went through the process of the death of the child. The various degrees of pain we all went through were excruciating.

Let me explain to you what pain is, because the pain which you have experienced is emotional pain and is only one aspect of pain. We also have physical pain, like somebody twisting an arm, or pain which is related not with our emotions, not with our body but with some type of attachment.

Yoga says that every mental state has an experience of pain and pleasure. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali, when talking about the vrittis of the mind says they are both pleasant and painful. He does not say the mind is pleasant or painful but the vrittis are pleasant or painful. Thus every state of mental experience can be either very painful or very pleasant.

When we experience pain it is usually because we are attached or involved in some way, emotionally, intellectually or

physically. However, the concept of total pain in yoga is of the body and mind together, not just one aspect. We can actually thank our lucky stars that we do not experience this pain because if we did we would not survive. We would be finished then and there. Thus, in answer to the question whether this is the ultimate pain, no, this is probably just a very high intensity of emotional pain because of the attachment you had.

Now, regarding the second part of the question, it was part of the buddhi that had been activated. The experiences related with each chakra are not felt when the mind is externalized. Chakras are not experienced when the mind is extroverted, but introverted, when the perceptions are directed inwards, not outwards. So, mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi or ajna manifest one way or the other on the external plane as a change in one's attitudes or behaviour, action or reaction. The actual experience associated with the chakras takes place at the time of meditation.

When you are sitting in meditation there will be a flood of emotion with such intensity that it will not be possible to control it. No matter how hard he tries, even the strongest of human beings will break down. If some type of fear comes, it will be so strong that the most fearless person will have a nervous breakdown. This is because chakras bring up, at the time of their awakening, what is embedded in our samskaras and in our karma in the dimension of the subconscious and unconscious planes. When we are dealing with conscious experience, those chakra manifestations are not so intense. The energies are dissipated. What we get is filtered experience, not the raw experience.

I thought my experience was raw. Does everyone have to experience those raw experiences?

There are different ideas on this, but in the process of growth they will come. Maybe you will experience them in a different way than me, and I will experience them differently than another person.

You get what you can handle?

Yes, and those who get more than they can handle usually end up in a psychiatric ward.

Do certain musical rhythms, drum beats and so on affect the different chakras?

Music or sound, according to yoga, has a definite influence on the different centres of the body and mind. In western psychology they explain that some types of music and sound excite the mind, while others relax it. The sound and music that we use in yoga is known as *mantra* and *kirtan*. The sounds are *mantras*; the music is *kirtan* and chanting.

There has been some good research done in Japan by Dr Hiroshi Motoyama. He is a psychologist and engineer, a Shinto priest, a university professor and the Director of the Institute of Religious Psychology in Japan. He used yogic mantras and combinations of mantras in the form of *kirtan* to see which different centres of the brain, body and mind are influenced by them. You should read his books on the subject for an in-depth answer, but in a nutshell, he found that every sound, every consonant and vowel influences a particular centre of our personality. When we say, “Ah”, for example, it influences the heart centre with satisfaction and enjoyment!

The different drumbeats, Chinese drumming, Japanese drumming and the classical Indian *tabla*, all have a particular effect on the personality, mainly on the nervous system. Some forms of drumming excite the nervous system and increase the activity of the brain. Other forms relax the nervous system, like a slow steady beat, “Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom!” African drums, which are very slow, steady and constant, relax cerebral activity. Each rhythm influences a particular chakra.

If you are familiar with the *tala* beat system of Indian music, you will know there are one-beat, two-beat, three-beat, four-beat rhythms, etc. The *ektala*, one-beat rhythm, affects swadhisthana chakra. The *teentala*, the three-beat rhythm, affects the anahata chakra, the *chartala*, the four-beat rhythm, affects manipura chakra.

What is the relationship between the pancha pranas, pancha koshas and the chakras, and how does that relationship manifest?

There is actually no systematic link between prana, kosha and chakra, but certain areas have been defined where the experiences of these different bodies take place in relation to the chakras. When mooladhara is awakened, annamaya kosha will be experienced, because that is the final manifestation of energy. Unmanifest energy is experienced in sahasrara. The birth of consciousness, in seed form, is experienced in bindu. Externalized consciousness is experienced in ajna, which is identified with the mind. The expansive quality of personality and life in general, is experienced in vishuddhi. The moving aspect of consciousness, feelings, emotions and desire, is experienced in anahata. The vitality or dynamism of consciousness is experienced in the form of fire in manipura. Deep, unconscious activities related with samskaras and karmas, come in the form of water, and are experienced in swadhisthana. Finally, the manifestation of energy as matter is experienced in mooladhara. This is the evolution of energy from unmanifest to manifest. You can call it the process of involution of energy and consciousness.

Converting matter and energy back to their original form, from manifest to unmanifest, is the aim of spiritual life. The five pranas are only a manifestation of the externalization of energy, while the *koshas*, the five dimensions of experience or consciousness, are the manifestation of *chetana* or unmanifest consciousness. The chakras represent the systematic growth and evolution of consciousness and energy in the manifest world, whereas the pranas and koshas represent the embodiment of either prana or consciousness in the dimension of Prakriti.

In the *Early Teachings* of Sri Swamiji, he writes that he needs three minutes for five malas. For two rounds of japa, I need twenty minutes. Is that too long?

This depends on the method of sadhana, because often it may be recommended that the mantra is practised at

a certain speed, and when the guru gives the mantra he prescribes the speed. For example, sometimes he will say to practise with the breath: inhale, one mantra, exhale, one mantra; or inhale and exhale, one mantra; or just keep on repeating the mantra without any awareness of any kind, only moving the mala one bead after another, one mantra per second.

Therefore, it all depends on the type of sadhana given; there is no fixed rule about the speed of mantra. What was said in the *Early Teachings* was relevant as Sri Swamiji spoke about practising that type of mantra, and if you take twenty minutes to practise two malas, that is all right. You do not have to increase the speed.

If kriya yoga leads to strengthening the power of concentration, is it possible that realization of the Self is just one big illusion, just a hypnotized belief?

I think you should read the book *Kriya Yoga*, and Sri Swamiji's *Teachings*, Volumes 1–6. He has dealt with this question many times, and he has said that kriya yoga is not a practice of concentration. Kriya yoga is a practice in which you are mobilizing the untapped forces in your body. The word *kriya* means mobilization.

Within the physical body there are many elements: biological, physiological, and psychological. These elements in psychological, biological or secretional form can be awakened by the practice of kriya yoga. If you take LSD for example, and I am certainly not saying that you should, what happens? The consciousness is altered, because it affects the chemical and nervous systems in the body, and a certain experience is caused. If you take marijuana, which is much lighter than LSD, then you will have a different experience. As a result, without even practising one-pointed concentration it is quite possible to have deeper experiences. That is the basic hypothesis of kriya yoga: deeper experiences can be attained by affecting the internal secretions of the body. This is the basic difference between kriya yoga and other yoga practices.

I am not belittling the other practices of yoga, for they are useful in developing concentration, and many people benefit from them. Concentration is when the mind is focused on one object. Raja yoga emphasizes concentration. Gradually, you limit your field of experience from multiplicity to one point, and expansion occurs from that point. There are practices of concentration like ajapa japa, nada yoga and others, but kriya yoga has very little to do with concentration.

The primary hypothesis of kriya yoga is that it is possible to obtain a state of mind where the consciousness can be altered, not through concentration, but by altering certain chemical forces in the body. Pranayama, ujjayi, khechari mudra, vipareeta karani mudra and asana help a lot with this. In certain postures, a surplus of adrenaline can be secreted from glands within the body. When you are practising kriya yoga, you are not just concentrating; you are utilizing techniques through which the chemical hormones and endocrine secretions can be released. The body can have certain experiences under the influence of these secretions. This is not hypnosis; it is not autosuggestion.

The purpose of kriya yoga is to create a higher quality of awareness. Unless you have a microscope you cannot see the bacteria or the virus; unless you have a telescope you cannot see the distant stars. In the same way, if you do not have higher awareness you cannot experience or understand the higher Self.

In order to realize the higher Self, *atman*, or Supreme Spirit, do you think that this mind is sufficient? Even if just a little problem appears, your mind cannot deal with it. Just as boiling water poured into a glass, breaks the glass into pieces, we have so many emotions that if we were to receive the higher energy in our present state of consciousness, I think that most of us could not hold it, we would just break! You need to have a different type of mind and a different type of awareness, and that powerful and penetrating awareness can only project and manifest after the awakening of kundalini.

The awakening of kundalini is not the end of spiritual life, it is the means. It is the process of acquiring microscopic vision, telescopic awareness. A very fine quality of awareness is required in order to apprehend that transcendental wave or form. With our ordinary mind, awakening of kundalini is not possible. Even if you are a peaceful person who has no so-called disturbances, it is still not possible. The ordinary mind has limitations. It is limited by time, space and object. Our minds are conditioned; transcendental reality is beyond time, space and object.

Should one take karma sannyasa after trying to develop the attitude of a karma sannyasin to some extent, or is it better to take karma sannyasa first and let the attitude develop spontaneously?

This question is answered in the book *Karma Sannyasa* by Sri Swamiji, and I recommend you read it, because the type of attitude and lifestyle that a person should have before and after karma sannyasa is described very beautifully. I can only give you my opinion and that is: before you miss the boat, get on it! Take karma sannyasa under the guidance of a guru. Under the direction of the master, just go headlong into the practise and sadhana of karma sannyasa and develop the experience of spirituality in your life. Of course, before doing that, read the YPT publication, *Karma Sannyasa*.

What is the meaning of *Om* and when we chant *Om* what is its effect on our body and mind?

In the beginning there was the word, the sound, and from that everything else came into being. That is *Om*. It is a vibration which is inherent in every object, both animate and inanimate.

If we go deep down into our own cells and atoms we will find that there is movement in them, and it is common knowledge that every movement has a sound or vibration whether audible or inaudible. We have given the name *Om*

to this vibration which governs the personality, the body, the universe, matter and energy.

In Sanskrit, *Om* also represents three distinct qualities of human nature. 'A', 'U' and 'M' are the three letters which make the sound *Om* or *Aum*. 'A' represents the creative aspect or generation; 'U' represents the aspect of organization, maintenance and preservation; and 'M' represents the quality of transmutation, the change from one phase of existence to another. We can also call it destruction, not in the negative but in the positive sense. These three letters also represent formless reality or super-consciousness, which many call God, but we are not concerned with that at this particular moment.

When we say a word it creates a type of impression in the mind. If I call you a very happy, efficient and eloquent person, you will feel very proud of yourself. Why? The words create some impression in your mind which you understand rationally. However, if I call you a complete idiot, you will get angry. Why? It is creating another impression in your mind. Any word, regardless of what we think it means in its rational aspect, influences our personality in a certain way at the vibratory level, and when we chant *Om* our mind, brain and personality undergo a tremendous energy change.

Experiments were conducted in Europe and the results found that when people chant *Om* their brain waves change. There are four brainwaves: alpha, beta, delta and theta. These waves represent spectrums of perception where we are relaxed, dynamic, tranquil, concentrated and one-pointed. People with predominant beta waves go into states of alpha and delta; while those with predominant alpha waves go into some other state.

There are certain sounds which have a transcendental influence on our personality, and sounds which have either a positive or negative influence. Mantras are sounds which influence the personality and the psyche neither in a positive way nor in a negative way, but in a transcendental way. They bring about a balance between the two poles of the personality, and *Om* is the most common mantra.

Is it better to do pranayama in the evening after a hard day's work than in the morning?

Even if the pranas are active in our system, they are not in a state of harmony so it is better to do pranayama in the morning to revitalize yourself. Of course, it is advisable to do it in the evening also, both times.

What is the aim of yoga?

Kabir Das, the great poet-saint of India, has stated it very simply: *Jala main kumbha, kumbha main jala, hai bahara bhitara pani* – “The pot is in the water; the water is in the pot; water is both within and without.” The pot is symbolic of the human form; the water represents the essence of creation in the form of consciousness and energy, both within and without. This is the human state. We are surrounded by energy, and the experience of divinity; we are surrounded by higher nature, and that experience is also within. However, there is a covering, a shell, the veil, which does not allow the merging of one with the other. How does that merging take place?

Phute kumbha, jala jala hi samana – “The pot breaks; the water mixes with the water.” The earthen pot breaks and what happens? The water which is contained inside mixes with the water outside: they become one. This earthen pot is the identity of the body and the ego which we have developed in life. It is this identity that we have to eventually drop if we want to mix the water which is contained within us, with the water that surrounds us. This saying of Saint Kabir epitomizes the aim and direction of yoga. Yoga provides us with the opportunity to experience the complete unity and diversity of the human mind and personality.

How can we control the mind without suppressing our thoughts?

This is a very complicated question and there are many theories concerning it. The mind is a very intimate part of our life and experience. There has to be a process through

which we can try to observe the action and reaction taking place within the mind.

There are two aspects of the mind: the subjective and the objective. In the subjective experiences of the mind, "I am involved", and in the objective experiences "I am observing." Therefore, we talk of understanding the mind, we should find a method by which we can detach our awareness from the mental experiences, and through that detached awareness observe what is taking place in the mind. One such method for example, is the pratyahara practice of antar mouna.

In antar mouna, we become aware of our mental activity. Thoughts come; we are constantly thinking; we become aware of the thoughts: What am I thinking? From where is that thought coming? Where is it going to? What is the source of the thought? What is the purpose of the thought? If we simply watch a thought arise from its source, come to the surface of the mind where it is translated by the intellect, and know the destination of that thought, I do not think it can be called suppression. Rather, suppression is pushing down something we do not want to think about, something we do not want to be aware of. Cognition is there but we do not want to cognize the thought. Realization is there but we do not want to realize the thought. That is known as suppression.

Here we are watching, we are experiencing, we are realizing, we are working out a method through which we can become aware of each and every pattern of thought. That is known as the observer attitude, *drashta*, and the seer. One percent of the mind is separated from the other ninety-nine percent of the mind. This one percent which you separate from the other mental experiences is known as awareness. Through this awareness you observe the mental process.

Once you realize the thoughts, pick up another process: feeling. Go through the same routine: Feelings come. What is the source? What is the destination? There should be no negation, no idea of either good or bad, positive or negative, because we contain both experiences; experiences

which can elevate us to great heights and experiences which can throw us down to great depths. We contain positive and negative, divine and evil.

This is one point where the majority of spiritual aspirants make a very big mistake. They do not know how to observe themselves. Consequently, when something good and positive comes from inside they like it, but when something bad comes they start to think that maybe they are not doing things right, "I am having these bad experiences and sensations. I am seeing the devil and demons and so many different negative things. I see murder. I see . . ." That creates another conflict in their minds. They have been practising their sadhana for so many years and still they have so much negativity and suppression, depression and anxiety inside! Actually, we should accept the negative manifestation of the personality as a stage of purification.

In the yogic system we have pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. *Pratyahara* means realization of the mind, as it is right now. *Dharana* means making an effort through which we can focus the mind in the field of our awareness. *Dhyana* is the stage where the focused mind is controlled by total awareness. In order to realize the mind, this is the yogic process to employ.

Another practice which is helpful in achieving this kind of realization is retrospection, which is also a part of pratyahara: reliving past experiences, re-living the events of the day. At night when you go to bed, see your whole day step by step from the time you woke up in the morning: you brushed your teeth, you had your breakfast, you did this, and you did that. Review the process of the whole day and have a good picture of the daily events. That way you will gradually realize certain areas of life where you might have made a mistake, where you might have suppressed something within yourself, where you could have expressed yourself in a different and better way. This practice will help you generate objective awareness, as a prelude to the practice of antar mouna.

Many people say that Bhagawan Rajneesh was on the wrong path with his ‘letting go’ methods and others say that he is a very important person in yoga. What is your opinion?

Well, what does it mean to ‘let go’? People can make their own definition. I will give you my definition. People believe ‘letting go’ can be done physically, mentally or emotionally, but in yoga ‘letting go’ actually means removing the blocks of the mind, the tensions of the mind, the conflicts of the mind in order to attain a balanced state of relaxation and concentration. It is a meditative process. It is not something which you do physically. It is not an exercise; it is not an asana, a pranayama, a bandha, or a kriya. It is a process of meditation where you observe yourself, find the blocks and release them. You ‘let go’. The grip these have on us, the insecurities that we have, we let them go.

Acharya Rajneesh is a very much talked-about personality and he has done a lot of good work in certain fields of spirituality and yoga. Of course, his methods may be different, but looking at the quality of the man himself, I am not talking about the group; he has been able to generate great interest in spirituality in a certain strata of society regardless of the method that he uses. Other than that, no comment.

I know it is important to put others’ needs before your own, but how do we achieve this in a world where people get exploited for such selfless action?

If one is sincere and true to oneself and to some cause, and simply is what one is, without expecting to give or to receive, then there is no way that anybody or any power in the world can exploit one. I asked the same question to Sri Swamiji about seven years ago. The answer he gave to me was, “If you remain true to yourself then nothing can exploit you, but the moment you try to adopt different roles for the satisfaction of your own mind and emotions, then difficulties will creep in.”

If we see somebody who needs help then we go to help them with the idea, “I am going to help”, but our ego thinks differently. The ego is looking for recognition. If by helping the other person we get recognition, we feel happy and come out satisfied. If we try to help somebody but at the same time are also seeking some food for our ego, the philosophy of selfless service becomes difficult to understand, and even more difficult to put into practise. If, however, we can remove the element of ego from the service, then other people will continue to try to exploit us, but they will be unsuccessful because our ego is not involved. When the ego is not involved, we will be able to see everything in a clear perspective. If I find that someone is playing funny games with me then I will just say, “Hari Om Tat Sat, find someone else to help you, or find your own path.”

It is people who allow others to exploit them. It is me and it is you who allow others to exploit us. If someone is stronger than me and can impose their ego on my ego then that is exploitation. This is where viveka comes in. Back out where necessary, go forward where necessary. If viveka is there, then there is no cause for suffering and pain. Therefore, develop viveka.

How do we assess our spiritual growth in the absence of a guru?

One way to determine whether we are progressing or not is to observe our reaction to different types of situations. How do we react in a demanding situation? Do we become tense? Do we become nervous? Do we become agitated? Do we become depressed? Do we become frustrated, or are we able to go through that event, that situation with a calm mind and a clear perception?

As we progress internally, we shall find that nervousness, frustration or depression will have no place in our lives at all. Momentarily we might feel these states, because it is normal human nature, but the time for coming out from that state will reduce drastically and a better quality of judgement, and more

intuitive perception will manifest in your normal day-to-day affairs. That is one, and possibly the only way of judging our spiritual growth in day-to-day situations in the absence of a guru. In extraordinary situations, however, it is not possible.

Given current international visa restrictions, how is it possible for a disciple to satisfy the traditional twelve-year period of living with the guru?

It is not necessary, especially these days, to live in the presence of a guru for twelve years. The rules were made when there were no visa restrictions and the type of lifestyle and the way of thinking were different from the modern way of living and thinking. The understanding was different and the situations were also different. Now, due to our educated background, we can understand a lot of things easily about the mind, body and consciousness which previously was not possible. Most people today know about the body, about the heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas, stomach, intestine, and so on. Hence, the guru does not have to instruct you on physiology as was necessary previously when this type of understanding was limited to a few.

Now we are trying to understand the mind. We have psychology and many techniques which tell us about the mind, how to control thoughts, how to become aware of our behaviour, nature, desires, ambition, our personal life and relationships. Consequently, it is not necessary for a guru to teach all that. We can have this knowledge anywhere, in a college, in a university, even in our home. People have become conscious to a very great extent. We have to adjust this tradition of living twelve years under the direct guidance of the guru. It is not necessary.

What is necessary is to follow the path that the teacher has shown to us so that we can become more and more efficient, aware and useful to both our own selves and society. Just come here whenever your visa permits, three months, six months, one year, two years or more. Live here, play and fight with everybody, with the hope that when you return home, you will

carry something back which can be useful in your future life. If your mind is strong enough, I am sure you will be able to maintain a link with your teacher.

It does not matter whether you are miles away from your guru. The link which you have will continue to assist and guide you in your future life. The important issue is not trying to go around the visa regulation, but learning how to develop this link with the guru. If you can learn this in one month's time you have done the job of twelve years. I am sure that as you progress with your sadhana, you will be able to have this realization.

Is the inner circle of the guru's closest disciples determined by a revelation of the guru projected to those disciples, or by the spontaneous aspiration, commitment and receptivity of the disciple?

I will vouch for the latter; it is the disciple who has to prove himself and not the guru. This much I can definitely say. I believe that it applies to every guru and every disciple, because I have had the opportunity of meeting many saints and gurus and I find that they are all one and the same. Mostly we are unable to understand what these great souls tell us, because their methods can be different. Some are crude, some are refined. It is the duty of the disciple to understand the essence of the teaching in its true sense, and not the meaning which they absorb intellectually.

No action and no thought are purposeless. Externally it may seem so, but it has come from within, from the mind. No matter how absurd it is, no matter how ridiculous, and no matter how sublime, that thought or action represents the state of mind. If you think of something as being very absurd and ridiculous, it will represent that particular moment of time inside your mind. You may change. You may think now, "I will kill somebody," or you may think, "Sorry, no, I will not kill that person." The thought came. It represented the frame of mind that you had one moment ago, even if you changed it five seconds later. The disciple has to get himself

under control. Know the mind, and apply the teachings of the master, spiritually and not physically.

When Milarepa went to his guru, he never sat in a class or went to any of his satsangs. The duty that his guru had given him was to carry stones from the bottom of the mountain to the top, and to construct a house, which he did. Just imagine yourself in his place. Would it be possible for you to be in his shoes? After the house was constructed, the guru did not like it. He said, “No, take the whole thing down, stone by stone.” Imagine it for yourself. Without grumbling, without saying what an idiot his guru was, Milarepa continued. He carried each and every block of stone from the top of the mountain down to the base and started to construct it right from the beginning.

Then what happened? One day after he had rebuilt the house many times, the guru called him a lazy bum and kicked him and Milarepa fell down a precipice. He was going to die but at the last moment something happened. He was raised up by some invisible hand and brought in front of the guru. He did not die. He was lifted up by somebody, some thing, an unknown, unseen force and put in front of the guru.

Now, does this prove the grandeur of the guru, or of the disciple or of them both? The guru chose a particular way of giving enlightenment to Milarepa and Milarepa’s greatness was that he accepted it. He accepted the full hardship, without any remorse in his mind and heart, without thinking or questioning why his guru was making him do all these things.

It is the greatness of the disciple which actually counts. This is what I meant when I said, “Understand the essence of the master’s teaching.” Exhaust the karma, exhaust the ego, and exhaust the *vruttis* or patterns of mind. The guru will show us the way, but we have to make the effort. The role of a disciple is more important than the role of the guru.

As there are many paths of yoga, what is the best way to begin?

The aim of yoga is to provide balanced growth of the human personality. Human beings are a composition of head, heart

and hands: head representing intellect; heart representing emotion; and hands representing action. You need to develop these three aspects of the personality simultaneously. Most techniques, philosophies or sciences have developed only one aspect of these three. Some are purely physical in nature, some are purely psychological and some purely emotional. Many different therapies have evolved, but for the average person the combined practices of yoga, which can help you to develop the head, heart and hands, are recommended.

In modern psychology the human personality is divided into four groups: dynamic, intellectual, emotional and psychic. In yogic philosophy the human personality has been divided into three groups: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic, and a specific part of yoga has been set aside to fulfil the needs of these different personality types. For the dynamic personality the practices of karma yoga are recommended; for the emotional personality, the practices of bhakti yoga; for the intellectual personality, the practices of jnana yoga; and for the psychic personality, the practices of raja yoga.

You have to decide what type of personality you have, whether it is intellectual, emotional, dynamic or psychic. Then select a group of practices which are suitable to your personality and practise them. Of course, the guidance of a guru will be highly useful when it comes to determining the yogic practices suitable for our personality requirements.

Generally, yoga begins with the body, goes on to the mind and then to the development of the spirit. To work with the body start with asana and pranayama; to work with the mind, start with the techniques of relaxation and concentration, such as yoga nidra, ajapa japa, trataka, antar mouna; and for the spiritual aspect there are various practices of dhyana, kundalini and kriya yoga. Learn those techniques and this will be a very beneficial and suitable system for everybody.

After taking karma sannyasa I feel a greater interest in serving, but at the same time the period of my sadhana is

reduced due to more engagements. Is this all right? Can you clarify the principles of karma sannyasa?

After taking karma sannyasa it is natural for some people to feel more interest in their work, because the attitude of the karma sannyasin is different from that of a non-karma sannyasin. When you are given karma sannyasa you are told about this attitude. How you have to work; how you have to live; how you have to do your sadhana. If you follow this guidance given by the guru you will definitely feel more inclined to work. There is now more of an objective, rather than a subjective involvement. There may come a time, as in your case, when you will find there is less time for personal sadhana.

Do not worry about it. Let your involvement in work become your sadhana. When you treat work as a part of your sadhana, you will find that you have much to gain from everything because, after all, the aim is to experience the spiritual aspect of our personality in every thought and action.

People generally perform actions but the spiritual idea of working toward perfection is not there. They work because they have to. If you were getting all the benefits of working while sitting at home with every comfort of life, would you work or not? The majority of people would not. You might be an exception, but the majority of people would definitely not like to bind themselves to a system where they have to be at the office at a certain time and where they are expected to fulfil certain duties. Everyone wants an easy life, so the idea of perfection in work is not normally combined with day-to-day activity.

In karma sannyasa however, you combine the idea of perfection with every action taken in your life. When you are able to do this, it is not necessary for you to have a separate hour for your spiritual sadhana. No. You can utilize that hour you have by going deeper and understanding your own nature, however, work and sadhana in unison will take you even further along the spiritual path.

Many people ask why there is so much emphasis on karma yoga in Ganga Darshan, whereas in other ashrams there is more emphasis on sadhana and study. Here we are learning how to combine the external experiences, the external worldly involvement, with our internal perceptions, understanding, knowledge and experiences.

As a karma sannyasin you will learn to develop a state of purification of the personality. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that a yogi by working, by acting without any type of subjective involvement, without any type of attachment, without any type of selfish feeling, can reach the state of self-purification. If you are not attached to the results of your work, what do you become? You become the witness of your actions, and when you become the witness or observer of your actions, do you feel pain or do you feel satisfaction and enjoyment; do you feel depressed or do you feel euphoric at times? No, you observe with the attitude, "I have to try to attain greater perfection, every second, every minute, every hour and every day, no matter what I do, no matter whether I am successful or a total failure." If we can utilize the faculties of body, intellect, mind and senses in a positive way, we will definitely attain the self-purification which comes with self-understanding and self-knowledge. Atma jnana is the object of sannyasa. Whether you are a karma sannyasin or a full sannyasin, you have to go through this process.

I have been a karma sannyasin for some years and now I feel that I wish to devote my life to yoga. Should I become a sannyasin or does this happen when the time is right or when the guru advises?

We always have this craving to become what we are not at present, because we have an idea or image of something nice and good and positive. We keep that ideal in front of us and we always try to achieve it.

Karma sannyasa is a sadhana. There is hardly any difference between a sannyasin and a karma sannyasin. It is

simply a question of initiation, letting go of responsibilities, and dedicating yourself to a particular cause. It is a question of initiation and of commitment, but otherwise the sadhana of a karma sannyasin, sannyasin or spiritual aspirant is the same. It depends on whether you want to get another diploma in your life.

After completing your MBBS, if you want to become an MS in the academic field, you can get another degree, but in spiritual life there is only one degree. Karma sannyasa is an external identity, sannyasa is an external identity, but the sadhana which you receive at the time of karma sannyasa or poorna sannyasa is something internal. It remains the same, and it always takes you towards the goal.

If you feel that you want to commit yourself as a full sannyasin, without any type of social or family obligation, then you can decide on taking poorna sannyasa. However, if you simply want to try poorna sannyasa for one, two or three years, then there is really no purpose to that, because here regularity in sadhana is more important. If you are regular in your sadhana, even as a karma sannyasin, you can attain a higher state of consciousness than poorna sannyasins who do not have that regularity. I would suggest that you concentrate on your sadhana for your development and growth and forget about poorna sannyasa.

I have seen many full sannyasins that, when they came to know that Sri Swamiji was giving karma sannyasa initiation, approached and asked him for it. There was even one swami who, after seven years of poorna sannyasa and living in this ashram, came and asked for mantra diksha, after seven years of sannyasa!

There are people like this person who feel that the more they are initiated the faster they will grow. It is not like that. You are given a vehicle. The vehicle is the sadhana and it depends on you whether you go in first gear or fourth gear. The car is the same but the motivation is yours. It should be your inner desire that carries you forward, and the same applies to both karma sannyasins and poorna sannyasins.

The swamis here are living and working for their spiritual evolution, but what are the possible rewards of enlightenment if it is as rare and elusive a thing as we are told?

Many people have talked about enlightenment and still humanity has not understood it. Even if I talk about it we will still remain at square one. I am not an authority on this subject and I am sure that you do not even know what enlightenment is. But one thing is sure; enlightenment does not mean the light shining in a dark night, no. That is a symbolic expression of enlightenment. Rather, enlightenment means perfection in our day-to-day activities, a realization which takes place every moment of the day, every second, “Yes, I am this, I am perfecting myself, I am at peace with myself.” This is known as enlightenment, perfection in every thought and every action; a realization which can take place every second of the life. To be aware, to realize something is known as enlightenment, in simple words.

Now, if you want to go into philosophy and discuss Brahman, God, individual soul and jivatman, it is going too far. It does not mean anything until you have actually experienced them in your own life. In order to illustrate this I will tell you a story.

Once a man came to a guru and said, “I want the highest knowledge that you can provide.” The guru said, “You are not yet ready.” He persisted, “Yes, I am ready. I am not going to leave your doorstep until you give me the highest knowledge that you can provide.” Then he went on a fast. Fortunately, the guru took pity on him and said, “All right, I will tell you something. *Aham Brahma Asmi* – “See Brahma in everything, see God in everything.” The man was very happy; everywhere he looked he could see Brahma; he could see God in every person, in every animal, in every tree. He was very happy as he started walking back to his home just contemplating and thinking how beautiful this world was, “There is Brahma everywhere!”

Just then a man came running by and shouted, “Hey, get out of the way quickly, a mad elephant is coming and

he will kill you!” The man replied, “Nonsense, how can one Brahma harm another Brahma? If you throw water on water what happens? It will just mix” and he continued walking very happily.

Unfortunately, the powers high above did not want it that way. The elephant came charging, picked him up, squashed him and threw him down, and he ended up in hospital. He was furious with the guru for the type of knowledge he had been given.

When the guru heard of his plight he came to the hospital and as soon as the man saw him he started to abuse the guru left, right and centre. The guru said, “Tell me the whole story from beginning to end.” He related, “This is how it all happened. I was walking along when a man came running up and said, ‘Get out of the way, a mad elephant is coming’, but I continued walking because I thought the elephant also to be Brahma, and this is the end result.” The guru said, “You missed a very important point. Who was the man who came and warned you? Was he also not Brahma? You should have listened to him.”

We all make this type of mistake. We never listen to the warnings, and we continue walking into trouble. This is not the concept of realization. It is only intellectual satisfaction. Realization is something more personal, more intimate than anything, any philosophy or book can ever provide. It is an experience of perfection, of totality, and in order to achieve perfection and the experience of totality one has to struggle with one’s mind. One has to struggle with one’s karmas and samskaras.

The swamis here are not working for enlightenment. They are working in order to make themselves a little bit better, more perfect than they were or are, and for us that is good enough. As we exhaust our karmas and samskaras, maybe one day we will suddenly realize that we are ‘It’, but if we wait for the searchlight to shine on us that is never going to happen. It is better to make every action a perfect one or at least try to make it perfect; it is better to make every

thought a well-balanced, harmonious one, or at least try to do so. Then, as our consciousness evolves this rare and elusive thing known as enlightenment will cease to remain rare and elusive. It will manifest automatically, spontaneously, outside, inside and everywhere.

How far should one go in trying to help someone who obviously does not wish to change?

There is a story of a yogi who was taking a bath in the river when he saw a scorpion fall into the water and begin to drown. He picked the scorpion up and took it towards the shore. While he was doing so the scorpion stung him so he threw it into the water again. He did this twenty times, and twenty times the scorpion stung him. People said, "That is the karma of the scorpion, let him drown." He replied, "No, it is my duty to save it and it is its nature to sting. He is doing his duty and I am doing mine." Therefore, if you are a yogi you can just keep on doing your duty.

If people have to suffer their own karma, is there any point in our trying to help them?

If they are harvesting the fruit of their karma, you will not be able to help them. However, if you help them and they become better, then you are the catalyst to change their karma. If you can be a catalyst in changing somebody's karma, why not? From our side we have to make every effort to help others, but if suffering is the fruit of their past karma, then despite every effort and goodwill, they will suffer.

What effect does taking sannyasa have on a collective and family level?

I do not know what effect it has on a family level because when I took sannyasa, I left my family and I do not know if there was a reaction. Karmically, it is said that if one is able to follow true sannyasa, then seven past generations and seven future generations are liberated. It means that the effect of sannyasa helps to smoothen out the process of karma.

On a social level, unless one is established on the path of sannyasa, one cannot see the effect sannyasa is having on society, and not many people are established in sannyasa. There are many people who decide to take sannyasa because they want to escape from certain situations at home and in society. There are many who think of sannyasa as a good opportunity for employment. You get your food, security, a place to stay, and you have respect from those who consider you to be a sannyasin. For many, it means having a good carefree life, smoking chillums and getting high.

Those who have actually lived sannyasa have become immortal in the history of humanity. Paramahansa Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had a great and powerful influence on society, as did Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda and Sri Swamiji. Many people who have lived the sannyasa ideal, have been able to provide a different kind of vision and outlook for society. Society recognizes this, despite the fact that it might not have the strength to pursue that vision. One has to live sannyasa and not just take sannyasa. Being initiated is just the first step, living it is the second and final step.

Attachment to the family is always going to be there, you cannot avoid it. As long as you have a mind and a body, you have to live according to the 'Law of Nature'. The attachment between family members and oneself, and their imposition of ideas and desires, is a continuous process. A sannyasin has to make an effort to be detached from such impositions. There are very few supportive families who actually help a family member to take sannyasa, one in thousands or millions. For the family, children are tickets for future happiness and security. In India, children represent financial security, cash! In all Asian countries, the son is always the money-earner of the family. It is much harder for people who think this way to let go of their security. The tradition says that a total cut-off from past life and family is necessary when sannyasa is taken.

Taking of sannyasa is not something one has to analyze intellectually. Can I do it? What will happen? That intellectual process is detrimental to the sannyasa lifestyle.

I am talking about sincere sannyasa. Anybody can wear geru and claim to be a sannyasin. One Upanishad states that this path is like the razor's edge on which you can only walk if your vision is fixed straight ahead; side-step or lose your balance and you are going to fall into the chasm on either side. In sannyasa one can become a great jnani, but not necessarily a jnana yogi, or one can become a great bhakta, but not necessarily a bhakti yogi. Our comprehension is limited to the physical dimension. The sadhana and process of sannyasa extends far beyond it.

A sannyasin has the force to create anything. We all have that force, but we use and misuse it differently. If the nose is blocked, we think it is sinusitis and after sometime it becomes sinusitis. A pimple can become a cyst through mental power or fear; a cyst can become a cancerous tumour just through mental power. When a thought combines with the raw force of an emotion, fear or belief, it can create changes in the body and disrupt an entire life.

If you are far away and you hear a rumour that the suburb where you live has been gutted by fire, your anxiety will be so great that you will not sleep for five days and nights, wondering if your house caught fire or not. Similarly, any ordinary thought combined with a catalytic agent, can become a force when directed with consciousness and prana in the right direction. It can become a very powerful force with the ability to create a new heaven. We hear stories of different siddhas who are able to materialize something from the air with a wave of their hand, and it is a fact that there is a process by which it can be done.

When a sannyasin is living continuously in the present and not in past memories, everything becomes clear. Yoga has defined memory as a vritti. If you live in the past, continuously thinking about this or that, then there is no *chitta vritti nirodhaha*, blocking the patterns of the mind. You are hung up on your memories, so in that respect you are not practising yoga at all. Meditation is not yoga, that is final. There are people who meditate eight hours a day and do

not gain anything. Why? The vrittis are not being controlled. Just having a car will not help you get from one destination to another; you have to use the gears. Control of a vritti is a gear. *Pramana*, right-knowledge, is the first gear, and the car begins to move slowly, and by the time you come to *smriti*, memory, the last vritti, it is in overdrive: go as fast as you can! The hanging on to the past, on a personal, intellectual or emotional level, is the last thing you have to let go of before you begin to live sannyasa life in its true sense.

Can you discuss the different types of mantra and their purpose?

In the *Atharva Veda* they have given many mantras for different kinds of illnesses, even for toothache and headache. They are not simple and today we do not really know about them. In villages people do know these mantras, and they can do anything and everything with them. If a snake bites someone, they can call it, make it suck the poison out, and thereby save the person's life.

The vedic rishis evolved three sets of mantra. The first set, with a spiritual aim in mind, is used in yoga for purification of the mind, awakening pranas and going within.

The second set of mantras is for propitiating the deities that live in trees, in the elements, and in water. This concept of elemental worship is very much misunderstood by foreigners. The Australian book *Song Lines*, by Bruce Chatwin, tells how the Aborigines had a personal name and song for everything on earth. It is not imagination, it is real. People who are one with nature can perceive the vibration of every stream, stone and tree. Everything in nature has a name. Just as humans have names, a general grouping, as well as an individual name, in the same way every kind of vegetable, mineral and animal has a name that corresponds to its vibration, energy, and level of evolution. If you call a tree by its name it will respond. However, if I say, "Hi, tree", nothing will happen. The mantras of the category of elemental worship are titles invoking the life force of the

various forms of creation. The yogis were very much aware of this science and used it to create a special, elevated and harmonious environment.

Are these nature spirits divine beings?

The tree and plant spirits, and the devas which live in vegetables and trees are not divine beings, they are the energy of that life manifesting.

Do they have consciousness?

Yes, they are all like small children, or babies. As long as you show care and acknowledge them, they will look at you, smile, and play with you. If you leave the room and come back ten minutes later, they will be fast asleep. One has to be constantly involved with them in order to keep them active because their level is so subtle, they can easily go into a state of sleep or dormancy. They are innocent and spontaneous; but they do not think, like we do.

The third group of mantras is mainly for attaining physical health, remedies for illness, fever, headache, stomach ache, and so forth.

How do they work?

They work by building up the level of energy in one specific part of the body. If you say a mantra for diarrhoea or dysentery for example, and perfect it, it will rectify the *samana* energy, which is responsible for digestion.

Do you have to pronounce it exactly for it to work?

Definitely. When I was about four years old I thought I was going to die. I had a variety of smallpox. It is so vivid in my mind! I was practically on my death bed. One night as I was lying, writhing in pain, my mother came and sat beside my bed. I think she had even given up hope that I was going to survive. She put a photograph of Sri Swamiji near my pillow and started repeating some mantras, and while listening to that intonation I went to sleep. The dream I had that night

was about the illness. I was trying to run, but my feet would not move. I was making a desperate effort but my feet were glued to the ground. There was a demon, a black figure reaching out towards me, and I was aware and fearful that if that demon caught me I would die. Just when it was about to grab me, there was a flash, like lightning, and Sri Swamiji appeared and took hold of the demon and told it not to come back again. The next day there was no pain, not even spots. I was normal as if nothing had happened. I woke up and went out to play. It was a miracle.

Did you hear the mantra?

Yes, I went to sleep listening to my mother and according to her, she sat chanting beside my bed all night.

Is faith in the mantra important?

Initially, in order to awaken the potential of the mantra, the intensity of your involvement is necessary. Later on it becomes spontaneous.

Have you had other experiences which demonstrate the power of mantra?

My grandfather used to know a lot. He could immobilize people from a distance. When people used to travel by foot and bullock cart, while going through the jungle where there were robbers, he would chant a mantra to immobilize the robbers. After going about three to four miles down the road, again he would chant something, and the robbers would be freed. He knew many things about mantra and always used them positively. He was the friend of every kind of animal. He would tell stories of how monkeys used to make *laddoos*, sweets, for him, out of wild fruits.

My grandfather could call any snake at any time. Once he had gone on a tour and came to a village. The son of the headman had recently married and a snake had suddenly bitten him. There were many of these *mantrics*, as they are called, trying to call the snake to come and suck the poison

out. They had put milk and other foods there because it is said that when the snake sucks the poison out of its victim, its own body becomes poisoned. It has to drink milk and other things immediately. The snake came and circled the place repeatedly but did not come near the man it had bitten. No one could figure out why.

My grandfather was sharp, and felt that something was not happening correctly. He asked who was with the man when he was bitten by the snake. Everybody replied that it was his wife. He told the man's wife that if she wanted to save the life of her husband then she had to get into the same position she had been in when the snake bit him. She lay down in the same bed, holding him, with her hair falling to the floor. The snake came, went up her hair, on to the bed, sucked out the poison and came down again. Then it drank the milk and died.

Does a person have to lead a pure life in order to attain these powers?

There are particular things such as turning stone into gold, curing a snake bite, or an illness of any kind, which require a certain frame of mind. They do not require purity of mind; it is just a skill. Traditionally there are only eight siddhis, the *ashta siddhis*. Apart from that, any other miracle is not considered a siddhi. For those eight siddhis you need to have a pure life and mind, for the others you do not. Anybody can attain them.

Do you believe in ghosts and spirits?

Just as there are good people and bad people according to their samskaras and karma, there are good and bad spirits. There are two spirits in this ashram. The first is in the Kutir, in my room, which is the oldest building here. The walls are about four feet thick and are made out of mud. We have simply remodelled it and put stones on the surface. When we were working on that area we found some huge cannonballs stuck into the wall. For a long time this was a fort. Now it is an ashram, a fort of a different kind.

I had a peculiar experience while sleeping one night. A shadow loomed in the light above the mosquito net. I could not move or do anything. It dissolved in the darkness of the room. For some time after, having the anticipation of a child, I was expecting it to return. I used to open my eyes, look around and then close my eyes for a few minutes.

I had four sleepless nights. On the fifth night I went to sleep. Again, I woke up and the same shadow was there. This time I had made myself strong. Either he stays or I stay! I opened my eyes and saw that same shadowy figure. I asked it, "Who are you? What do you want?" That image lingered for five or ten minutes. I said, "I am going to sleep." I turned over on my side, and of course the light went off.

Mentally I started repeating my mantra at a hundred miles an hour, and did all kinds of psychic protection – all the gods and gurus were called to protect me. When I turned back over, the shadow was still there but the fear had gone. It is hard to describe the voice; it was like a rumbling sound with clear intonation. I think it was mental not verbal, but it was hard to differentiate. I had asked a question in English and the answer was, "I live here and I have lived here for many generations." I said, "I also live here now." I still see the image sometimes when going to the bathroom. It is like a friend in the house now.

The other spirit is in Jyoti Mandir. It is a white figure coming out of the ground. People who have stayed in the room next to Jyoti Mandir have also seen it. Once one swami was sleeping there and was awakened by the big drum being played, so they went to see if somebody had been locked in, but there was nobody there. They went back to their room and the drum started again. These two ghosts are friendly; the one in Jyoti Mandir is like a protector of the ashram. Apart from these two, there are no other ghosts in the ashram.

What qualities do we need to cultivate in order to be able to help others?

Karuna bhavana, compassion, because that would make you act as necessary. If you see a person who is really in need of

some help, that feeling, that compassion will make you reach out and help to the best of your ability. For example, if you see a twenty-year-old young man with a PhD begging in the streets, you will have compassion, but the form of compassion will be different; you might help him find a job rather than giving him one rupee. You might help him organize his life and get him on the right road.

The compassion will be different again if you see one of these poor people who have no other option but to beg, You might give them five, ten or twenty rupees out of compassion. Compassion in its real sense will carry viveka with it and not just the feeling of pity for somebody.

Does the soul of the child look for its parents according to its evolutionary level?

Some theories say the soul chases the parents, but it depends on the level of evolution of consciousness which was reached in the previous life. You have to remember that consciousness and soul are two different things. The soul, *jivatma*, is one identity, and consciousness is the link between the soul and worldly perception. Whether we are talking about the second, third or fourth dimension, the link between life and atman is consciousness. The soul is dependent upon consciousness and consciousness is dependent upon the soul. By itself, the soul cannot do anything and by itself consciousness cannot do anything.

The tantric concept is of the soul in the form of *jivatma*, consciousness in the form of Shiva, and a third aspect of dynamic energy in the form of Shakti. Tantra also talks about the fourth aspect of *paramatma*, not the individual soul but the universal soul. The individual soul is just an expression of the universal spirit. We are unable to comprehend the universal spirit, but we can rationalize that within us there is a soul and within different beings there are different souls. I do not consider my soul to be the same as yours; it is different. It has a different garb of consciousness and is definitely distinct from the universal

soul which, at present, we are unable to understand, or to experience.

To make it clearer, let us go back to the time before our birth. One might say that this is only speculation, just a theory or concept, but let us try to imagine where we were before our birth and where we will be after our death. What happens to the experiences that we have gained in this life or to the level of evolution that we have reached in this life?

After we die the body disintegrates, but the consciousness continues to live, and it is this consciousness which creates a link between the soul that takes rebirth and the material world. This is the tantric concept.

The experiences gained in this lifetime, which are embedded in the human psyche in the form of samskaras, deep-rooted memories or karmas do not cease to exist after the body dies. They become like the invisible virus programs inside a computer, which are only activated when the time is right, and then there is rebirth. Reincarnation is dependent on the evolution of consciousness and not on the soul. Your body follows your legs; your legs do not go independently while the body stays behind. In abstract terms, consciousness is the legs and the soul is the body. Accordingly, my head may not want to go to some place but if my legs are going my head automatically follows it.

There are several theories connected with this. For example, Samkhya philosophy states that after consciousness has reached a certain point of evolution, some kind of rationalization and analyzing takes place deep within the psyche, and if there is the feeling that one has fulfilled every karma or samskara then there is no rebirth. If there is a feeling that there is still something to fulfil in life, or some experience to be gained, then again there will be rebirth.

Vedanta says that the urge to create was the force which motivated the creator to bring the universe into being. In the Upanishads, which are part of the vedantic system, there is a saying that the Creator wanted to have many manifestations and so he created two forces, prana and mind, and through

them he produced many other manifestations. So, here we find the idea that the desire to create is there. If the desire to create was not in the mind of the Creator, there would have been no creation. Even with the Creator there is the idea of desire. Again we come back to the same thing; ambitions, unfulfilled desires, unfulfilled experiences, which can cause us to come back to this dimension in any form.

There are many stories to illustrate this point. One such story is of a saint who was dying. He called his disciple and said, "I have fulfilled my every desire in life, but while lying here on my bed waiting for death to come, I have seen a mango tree with a ripe mango on it outside my window and now I have the desire to eat that mango before I die." The disciple went running out and fetched the mango, but by the time he came back the saint was no more; he had left his body. Night after night the disciple had a dream that his guru, the saint, was telling him that he wanted to eat the mango and the disciple thought, "Well, that was the last desire of my teacher, how can I fulfil it?"

One night, the disciple had a dream in which he saw a mango with a nice big, fat worm inside. He could not understand it. He went to another teacher and asked, "I had this dream, what does it mean?" The other teacher replied, "That is your guru in the form of a worm." The disciple thought, "This man must be crazy, how can my guru, a self-realized person, take birth in the form of a worm?" Then the teacher explained that his guru had this last unfulfilled desire but had died before he could taste the mango, and that desire had pulled him back. "The soul of the saint is now in the body of that worm. Go and kill the worm and it will be all right, the soul will be liberated." The disciple went and looked. There was the fruit and there was a nice, fat worm inside. He took out the worm and squashed it. That night he had another dream, in which his guru came and said, "Thank you."

I do not know how far this story is true, but if we consider it in view of the thoughts that have been presented in

different systems and philosophies, then we can say that this is a true story. It could happen.

The quality of consciousness is another thing which is important is; whether it has been impregnated with rajasic, tamasic or sattwic qualities. If my samskara, karma, ambition and identity are tamasic, then all the impressions which I receive will be classified as tamasic. All my actions will be tamasic, all my desires will be tamasic, all my effort in life will be for the fulfilment of these tamasic tendencies and this will hamper the growth of the sattwic tendencies. It is said in tantra that those who die with a tamasic nature will take rebirth, but will have no choice in the matter. Those who die with a sattwic nature will have the choice of their parents, and those who die with a rajasic nature, depending on their state of evolution, will either be able to choose their parents or the environment in which they are to live.

If one becomes physically sick and requires medication, is it better to have natural remedies, homeopathic or alternative treatment as opposed to traditional western medicine? Should one maintain a balance between both types of treatment? What is the yogic view?

Regarding the treatment, I think you should decide. Of course, natural remedies are definitely better. They do not create a state of physical imbalance, as tends to happen with medicines that contain different types of chemicals and hormones. Yoga prefers the use of natural remedies. Sometimes however, the effect of natural remedies is slow in coming and if one needs immediate relief from illness, then the allopathic medicines can be utilized in order to overcome a critical situation. Different types of therapies which may have a slow but steady effect on the body can be tried simultaneously.

The concept of health in yoga is to realize the natural stamina, strength and ability of body, mind and emotions. The closer we are to our natural self, the less likely the problem of getting an illness or disease. We know that most illnesses

and diseases are caused by an imbalance in the system: malfunction of organs, imbalance in the nervous or hormonal system, in the emotional structure. If we can overcome the problem of a disease just by correcting an imbalance, it will be more effective and beneficial for physical health.

With the constant practice of yoga, people experience that they do not become sick easily. Of course, it is natural to have runny noses and stomach aches, and maybe dysentery or constipation, but these are the worst illnesses that you will find amongst yoga practitioners. If we simply become balanced in our lifestyle and remain at ease with ourselves, then there is definitely no place for disease, and that is the concept of yogic health.

It is said that every action reaps a reaction. How does that apply to the case of a violent action such as suicide?

One of the attributes of consciousness is that it will never allow any kind of experience, which is detrimental to its growth, to leave any kind of impression. It will immediately seek an outlet and remove that experience from the mind, even in the case of suicide. There are two aspects of it, instinctive and logical, but before we go into that I would like to explain something else.

We have two experiences of consciousness, one is the mental experience and the other is the transcendental experience. The mental experience means everything that goes through our mind in the waking, dreaming and sleeping states. The sleeping state is the last of the mental experiences of consciousness. What is beyond sleep? We do not know. After that it becomes transcendental.

Our actions take place in the mental state of consciousness. I am just creating the term 'mental state of consciousness' in order to explain this. The transcendental consciousness is unaffected, unless or until something happens which leaves a memory of this dimension of life in the transcendental state. Generally, every action we commit, and every reaction we face, happens in the first

dimension of mental consciousness. Even the samskaras and karmas belong to this mental consciousness and not to transcendental consciousness. Mental consciousness is manifest and transcendental consciousness is unmanifest. If something goes from the manifest to the unmanifest it is very difficult to eliminate. Fortunately for us such happenings are very rare, only one in ten billion or a trillion, so we can forget about that.

If I commit suicide instinctively, due to an outburst of emotion, it will create a reaction or karma in my mental consciousness, and if that karma is too powerful to be eliminated by this consciousness, then it will reflect on it. However, if it is not powerful, and generally instinctive karmas are not powerful, then it can be eliminated naturally by the mental consciousness itself.

Karmas which are created through logic, or with awareness and understanding, are also easily eliminated, because the awareness that, “I am committing this deed”, will not allow it to be transferred to the transcendental consciousness. The second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* deals with the transcendental consciousness and this question deals with the first stage of consciousness.

In the first stage of consciousness there are four aspects: *manas*, which is the thinking and speculating mind; *buddhi*, intellect; *chitta*, the total field of mental consciousness, and *ahamkara*, the ego identity. The instinctive action bypasses the aspect of manas, buddhi and chitta and goes directly to ahamkara, because that instinctive awareness is part of ahamkara, not of rationality. Then the reaction of that particular deed will take place in the dimension of ahamkara.

How will the ego counteract the reaction of suicide? It will create a memory, but that memory will not be in the form of having killed oneself. It will be in the form of the negative frame of mind in which one found oneself at the time of committing suicide. It will not be the memory of, “Bang!” it will be the memory of frustration, depression, anxiety, which

is much more powerful than the noise “Bang!” This memory which is now embedded in ahamkara will later on become a part of our tamasic nature. Consequently, suicide will be reflected in our life as something tamasic.

Now, if in the next life the environment into which we are born is conducive to eliminating that tamasic nature, then naturally, it will be eliminated spontaneously. A reaction took place, but it will be removed. If the environment or the situation into which we are born is tamasic and the other aspects of sattwa and rajas are subdued, then that tamasic nature will give rise to criminal or animal tendencies, which will be the reaction of the previous karma. Please remember that the gunas will control the action and reaction.

After I have taken the decision that there is no other option for me but to commit suicide, the suicide is committed by logic, and very peacefully I go to my room and do the deed. That karma affects all four together, my buddhi, chitta, manas and ahamkara, because through buddhi I rationalized it first, “Shall I do it? Shall I not?” Through my speculative nature I analyze it, “What will be the reaction? Will I enjoy death or not?” and so forth. Through my chitta, I became aware of the consequence, before I changed the nature of the guna.

Therefore, although elimination of the body is considered bad, the psychic or mental process involved in suicide is not detrimental to the growth of consciousness. We feel that it is something not right because for us it is loss of life and life is to be preserved. When we talk in terms of the effect a karma has in the form of reaction in our consciousness, then it is a very minor thing, because it does not affect the real nature of consciousness. It only affects and alters it up to a point and is further influenced by the gunas, by the mental consciousness.

What are the surest and quickest ways of awakening concentration and meditation?

Start gradually by bringing certain disciplines into your life. Develop awareness; become aware of your limitations and

strengths. In this way, gradually discover yourself. So many activities are taking place spontaneously within us that our conscious mind has to filter out the unnecessary activities and information. If we try to become aware of everything that is happening to us externally, environmentally, in our family, at work, in our mind and emotions, we will go crazy. It will be like trying to fit the whole ocean into a bucket. It is impossible.

Let us take, for example, the concept of awareness. You blink, but are you aware of the fact that you are blinking? No. Many things happen that we are not aware of. You go into a room many times. You see everything, but if I were to ask you a simple question like, “How many tube lights or ventilators did the room have?” you would have to go and count them. This is known as a lack of awareness. The actual process of mental concentration and mental education begins when we gradually start to become aware of our surroundings and of the different activities that are taking place within, physiologically and psychologically. That is the quickest way to awaken concentration and meditation.

The slow, but surest way, is to start at the top and finish at the bottom. Try to sit for meditation and go deep. You will have good experiences, but that will be the end of it. In order to understand those experiences you will again have to start from scratch. Before you can speak a language, you have to learn the ABC's. First you have to learn how to make words, then understand the meaning of the different words, and only after that can you start spelling, reading and writing. The same principle applies with meditation.

How and when do you find the sadguru and where?

It is a matter of personal experimentation. How do you find a suitable wife for yourself? Where do you find her? There is no answer to that. How do you find a proper husband for yourself? There is no answer to that either. Do you pick and choose a husband in the supermarket? Or do you pick and choose a guru in the supermarket? No, it is a matter of personal experimentation.

The *sadguru* is someone with whom you can link yourself, who can guide you, and with whom you can be absolutely sure can guide you in every aspect of life. Just as you find a husband or a wife, in the same way you find a sadguru. And where do you find him? Anywhere, there is also no answer to that!

What is ‘kundalini shakti’?

Kundalini, according to yogic philosophy, is the dormant power within all beings whether human or animal, the evolutionary force of unmanifest energy. When it tries to manifest it adopts different forms; it goes through a process of metamorphosis, represented by the different psychic centres or *chakras*.

Unmanifest energy is symbolized as being the energy of sahasrara, the highest centre, situated at the crown of the head. Manifest energy is symbolized by mooladhara chakra, which is situated at the base of the spine. The other chakras lying in between these two represent the transformation of unmanifest energy into manifest energy.

In this process of change, *mooladhara chakra* represents the element earth, solidity, matter, which is the last stage in the evolution of energy. Before that we have *swadhisthana chakra*, which represents the water element, an element which is less dense. Prior to water we have fire, even less dense than water, which is represented by *manipura chakra*, and before that air, which is represented by *anahata chakra*, less dense again than fire. Then we have ether which is represented by *vishuddhi chakra*, and which is less dense than air. Before ether we have mind or consciousness.

Energy, according to yoga philosophy, has progressed through these different stages to reach the state where it is now; and it has stopped there. The awakening of kundalini is the reverse process, or we can even call it the evolution of energy from manifest to unmanifest. It is this energy which is represented by the form of a serpent or snake; therefore, many people call it the serpent power. In Sanskrit we call

it kundalini. *Kunda* means a deep pit, something which resides deep down, and mooladhara is a representation of that.

Should yoga teachers try to treat the physical and mental problems of patients when they are not sure how to deal with them?

Do not try it. If you try to do so without knowing how, then you will just land yourself in hot water. Every yoga teacher must have the philosophy to: “Only teach as much as you know. Do not try to impress others and do not try to become a prophet overnight!”

If you decide to impress others and try to become a prophet overnight, only idiots will go to you, but if you want to help humanity in the true spirit, always remember not to go beyond your ability. When you cannot help any more, when you have taught everything that you can, and still you are asked for help, refer the person to somebody else who can guide them.

When you began school, your first teacher did not try to bind you to the same class all the time but prepared you so that you could easily go into the next class and learn further. This should be the attitude of a yoga teacher. If there are no competent teachers in the city or area where you live who can deal with this problem, then help that person to find a correct teacher, even if it takes time. Your worth as a yoga teacher will then be seen.

What is the relevance of a spiritual name?

A spiritual name is an identity of the spirit, and just as we give a name to the body for the purpose of recognition, it is considered that the spirit is a composition of different higher spiritual qualities, and that the naming and awakening of a particular quality takes us nearer to the realization of the spirit. You might have your other name like Singh or Smith, by which your body and mind are recognized, but your spiritual name will be different.

Take the name Jnanamurti for example. *Jnana* means wisdom, *murti* means symbol. It implies that one should, through the development of viveka, awaken the power of wisdom, and through this awakening come nearer to the spirit to become a symbol of discrimination and wisdom.

Why is it that personal mantras are given to us in Sanskrit? How are the effects of Sanskrit mantras different or similar to English language mantras, for example?

A mantra is a combination of sound vibrations which influence and alter one's mental, emotional and psychic personality. The word *mantra* itself means liberation of energy. The force which releases the energy within the mind is the definition of the word mantra. It is not a question of Sanskrit, English, Chinese or any other language; it is just a concept of different psychic centres which are awakened and stimulated by the repetition of a particular sound vibration.

Thus far, research into mantra has only been conducted using Sanskrit consonants and vowels. Please remember that the consonants and vowels used in mantra do not necessarily mean anything, rather, they are just a collection of different sounds. We might interpret them in different ways according to our logic and understanding. For example, the mantra *Hrim* does not mean anything, but the sounds *Ha*, *Ra*, *Ee* and *Ma* awaken different psychic centres.

If you look at the petals of the different chakras you will see that one mantra has been written on each petal. If we go into this deeply we will find that by repeating the mantra of any one petal we can awaken or stimulate the pranic current going into that chakra. For example, mooladhara chakra is symbolically represented by four petals, each carrying a different mantra.

That does not mean that at the base of our spine there is a beautiful little flower with four petals. No, it simply represents the four pranic currents or *nadis* meeting at that particular point where mooladhara is situated. If the guru or teacher finds, in the process of chakra awakening, one

of the currents is inactive or not functioning fully, then he will assign a particular sound or mantra belonging to that current to stimulate or awaken it.

People consider the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* as belonging to Shiva. Yoga does not say that this mantra belongs to Shiva. In yogic terminology *Om* is the mantra of ajna chakra, *Na* is a mantra of manipura, *Maha* is the mantra of another chakra petal, *Shi* is a mantra, *Va* is a mantra of swadhisthana, *Ya* is a mantra of anahata. So, these sounds were combined as one sound, just like the tantric mantras *Hrim*, *Hroom* or *Phat*. They were combined to form a sentence or word which became part of the vedic or yogic system of mantra. Later on they were even combined to form prayers.

Mantras are not usually very long, just one, two, three or four syllables maximum. Take the Sanskrit mantra *Soham*. *So* means 'That', *Ham* means 'I am'. When we repeat the mantra we are just saying, "I am That, I am That, I am That", which leads us into a process of contemplation and eventually realization that we are the higher consciousness. However, this is a deviation from the actual effect the sound components of the mantra have on the chakras.

Mantras should not be thought of in religious terms. Again take for example, *Om Namah Shivaya*. *Namah* means 'salutation'; *Shivaya* means 'to Shiva'. One may think, "How can a phrase that means 'I salute Shiva' become a mantra of liberation for someone who has not been brought up in the Hindu tradition?" This is also a deviation from the actual psychic awakening caused by the mantra.

The meaning and effect of the mantra which takes place in our psyche acts on the level of our emotions and intellect. Yogis have viewed the mantra as awakening the psychic personality. All the sounds, all the consonants and all the vowels which exist in any language are the same. These sounds are represented in different chakras, in different nadis, in different flows of prana.

There is no distinction between the mantra that we repeat, individual or universal, and the theory of the chakras

and prana. There is a great difference however when it comes to saying, “This mantra is Sanskrit and I don’t understand or like Sanskrit. I want a mantra in English.” Of course, it is natural to think that way, because intellectually you are trying to find the meaning of what you are saying.

How would you define the sound of a generator, “Grrr”? It is a rumbling sound. You would define it differently than I would. If I say, “Gharghar” in Hindi, you would say it is, “Rumbling” in English. The sound effect, the vibration is the same; it is simply being translated differently by us according to our intellect. It is the same with mantra.

What is the significance of after-images seen while practising trataka, for example, on a candle flame or on geometric shapes? Why is trataka on the rising and setting sun inadvisable? If one practises for only a few minutes, would it have any adverse effects?

I will answer the second question first. When somebody is practising trataka on the rising or setting sun, direct viewing is not advisable because of the infrared and ultraviolet rays affecting the retina. There is the direct impression of the rays. We do trataka on the sun in a slightly different way. Get a bed sheet and hang it up. Sit behind the bed sheet and make a small punch hole in it. Then, on just the little bit of light that comes through the punch hole, do trataka during the rising and setting of the sun. Looking directly at the sun is not recommended.

As far as the after-images are concerned, anything that we see is retained in the retina of the eye for some time, and it is becoming aware of that impression behind the closed lids which is the initial purpose of watching the after-images during trataka. If the impressions were not there we would not see anything. There are many nerves which constantly send impulses from the retina to the brain and those nerve impulses are triggered when we constantly observe one thing, like a candle flame. If you just watch the candle flame for ten, fifteen or twenty minutes continuously, these optic nerves will

start feeling those impulses, which will be seen in the form of shadows, pinpoint of light or some type of geometrical figure. Consequently, what we are actually watching at the time of trataka is the performance of our optic nerves and nervous system. That is the physical aspect of it.

When we are able to stop the feeling of the optic nerves it is known as pratyahara of vision, and vision is probably the most important thing in one's life. From the time of our birth until the time of our death, we use our eyes. Without eyes we are limited as most of the sensory input and information is through the eyes. In order to make pratyahara perfect we have to block the optic sensory perceptions and this is the real aim of trataka, to improve the quality of meditation.

When you practise meditation after the initial practice of trataka, you will find that the mind is more one-pointed. There is more concentration and very little wavering, very little thought, and you feel very calm and peaceful.

How can I prepare myself for kriya yoga?

Before you learn to practise kriya yoga it is important that you develop the ability to visualize and to concentrate, and that you know about the location of the chakras along the body. When you close the eyes and try to feel the chakras inside, you can use different types of visualization. Letting the awareness rise from mooladhara up to ajna, bindu, sahasrara, touching each and every chakra like the level of water rising in a tube, is one way of visualizing and experiencing the chakras. Another way is with physical touch. Ask somebody to touch you gently at the chakra points on the spine. After a couple of rounds the person stops touching you and you simply try to maintain awareness of that touch.

Of course, there is one difficulty. Every novice wants to learn kriya yoga thinking that it is a very advanced practice of yoga, without first perfecting the other techniques of pratyahara and dharana. In order to practise kriya yoga it is necessary to have perfection and mastery over the practices of pratyahara and dharana, which will help prepare the mind

and awareness for the experiences you might have when you begin to practise kriya yoga.

Is the practice of yoga nidra broken if we move the body?

You can do anything in shavasana or yoga nidra. You can change the position; you can even sit or stand up. There is only one rule: do not break your concentration. Of course, when there is a mosquito bite, discomfort and pain, your concentration tends to break, but if you can maintain your concentration and separate the state of concentration from your body, you can do anything.

As long as your concentration, awareness and body are united it is better to be completely still, and when you feel some discomfort it is better to stop the practice and come out of yoga nidra or shavasana. Instead of doing it for forty minutes or half an hour, just do it for fifteen or twenty-five minutes, but try to make sure that there is no distraction, and no break in the state of concentration. This will definitely take time and practise, but it is something we should all try to achieve.

Once I was giving a class and I asked the students to do yoga nidra standing up. Five or six of them were standing up plus one lying down. The man standing at the back fell, and others followed just like a pack of cards falling over. He had no body awareness, he was just aware of yoga nidra, and later on he fell asleep standing up. He had no body consciousness at that time. He had acute concentration, even if it was only for a very short span of time, say five minutes, in which he was able to disassociate the consciousness from the body. That is the state of yoga nidra.

If you can maintain this state you can move, you can change the position or do anything. If not, gradually try to increase this span of disassociation between body and awareness and you will find many things happening.

Please enlighten us about the role of karma sannyasins in the family, social and public circles, etc. Kindly include

information about their daily activities, behaviour, work, movement, habits and dress?

Karma sannyasa is specifically designed for people who are still involved in the world and who have certain obligations, responsibilities and commitments, either to themselves, to their family or to society, but who at the same time want to maintain a spiritual identity.

Karma sannyasa initiation is meant for people leading a married life or who are in the process of getting married. It is not complete renunciation; it is meant for maintaining a spiritual identity, even when one is fully involved and engrossed in the activities of the world.

At the time of initiation, a sadhana is given by the guru, and it is suggested that it is followed religiously. Just as you have to eat and go to the toilet during the day, in the same way your sadhana should become a part of your life. The attitude of a karma sannyasin is the attitude of a karma yogi, “I am performing this action, not for material gain, not for my satisfaction, but to gain experience and to perfect myself. Whether right or wrong, these are my experiences.”

There is no restriction of any type in karma sannyasa initiation. You lead your married life as you normally do; you perform your daily duties as usual. However when you are at home or when you are practising sadhana, you are completely detached from your surrounding environment, you have nothing to do with it. You can wear guru in your home and for sadhana, but when you go to a party or to work, wear your ordinary dress.

Karma sannyasa is for people who want to play a double role in life. If you want to know more about it, the habits, requirements, and more, you should read the YPT publication, *Karma Sannyasa*.

Can the practice of yoga nidra help change the mental patterns from negative to positive?

This is one of the basic aims of yoga nidra. It happens when we make our sankalpa.

There are many practices of yoga nidra. Some are meant only for physical relaxation, and some are meant to purify, to remove the dirt from the upper layers of mind and consciousness, so that you can see the clear water underneath. Some are for making one more psychic, intuitive, and aware of the different bodies: the transparent body, the pranic body and the different experiences of other dimensions. Some practices of yoga nidra are simply to remove different kinds of psychological blocks, and some are meant to give one a better grasp of the psychic manifestations of life.

In the yogic tradition, there are eighty different techniques of yoga nidra, and I am sure that one of the eighty is meant for changing our negative tendencies into positive qualities. The sankalpa that we make in order to improve the condition and quality of life is a first step in this transformation. It is explained in detail in the YPT publication, *Yoga Nidra*. You should try to read it.

Shiva and his tantric lifestyle are very hard to understand. Could you enlighten us on this strange figure?

The concept of Shiva is something which has always attracted yogis, and only they are able to understand and experience him. People are often afraid of his image, considering him to be the destroyer and the leader of things inauspicious, such as spirit, ghosts, demons and ghouls.

The image we have of Brahma is of a figure with all the qualities that a human and a divine being should have, but at the same time he has a few more qualities like wisdom and creative genius. He is also depicted as a sober person who is always thinking, creating, contemplating and meditating; he is soft-spoken and there is intelligence behind all of his creation.

Vishnu, on the other hand, is depicted as a positively rajasic person who has all the worlds at his disposal. He is rolling in wealth. He is self-contented. He is the force that maintains everything, the ego. He has strength and wisdom.

Shiva is depicted as totally different from Brahma or Vishnu. He is the destroyer, the *Mahakala*, the ultimate conscience and consciousness of the entire human race. Simultaneously, he is portrayed as *Pashupati*, the Lord of animals, or the animal instincts.

According to tradition, on a scale of one to one hundred, the human form is the last and ultimate, and ninety-nine percent of creation is in animal, insect or other unknown forms such as spirit. Shiva has the experience, the knowledge of all forms of existence, known and unknown both. Do we know how an ant feels? No. Or a bird, or a reptile, or an animal? No. We can understand what human beings feel and how they behave, but Shiva had the knowledge and ability to know everything, to be the master of *pashus*, animals. He had courage, determination and raw willpower. At the same time he is also experienced in the aspect of *Bholanath*, the total opposite to Pashupati, embodying complete serenity and simplicity, lost in his own being, remembering no sin, knowing no sin, harbouring no wrongs, but forgiving and forgetting everything – beautiful!

To be a real tantric and a yogi is very difficult, because apart from the type of life you have to live as a sadhaka, the goal is set extremely high. Samadhi is only one experience. Experiencing all these forms of creation manifest in the consciousness, these ninety-nine lakh *yonis* or births, and experiencing each birth at will, without going crazy, but maintaining one's identity, and still be in samadhi is very hard. This is what Bholanath did while remaining completely serene, observant and watchful with a passive dominance. That is real tantra.

Do you believe in accidents?

Understanding an experience plays an important role in relation to 'accidents'. I would not say that I do not believe in accidents, rather I believe in my own wisdom to take me through life. To give one example, it is the nature of fire to burn. Suppose we light a match. If we are not careful the flame

will burn our finger. We would call that an accident, “I burnt my finger.” However, having the knowledge that fire burns, no matter how small it is, if I drop the match, the stick burns and the flame fizzles out. The accident is therefore avoided.

It is the nature of everything to have a positive, fruitful experience and also a negative, distasteful one. With knowledge and experience we can overcome accidents, and once we do so, once we begin to understand the nature of things, living will become a much smoother process.

Can a mantra be given to awaken a specific chakra?

Yes. There are universal mantras which are the most common, there are mantras which belong to you personally, and then there are mantras which are specially designed to suit your need and personality. Designed mantras may change from time to time depending on the need and achievement, but the personal mantra does not change at all because it does not represent personality, chakra, energy, mind or consciousness, but the link of the individual mind with the higher mind. Therefore, if you have a personal mantra you should continue with that all the time, and if the teacher finds that you need to work with a particular chakra for some time he may, at his discretion, give you a particular mantra for it.

Why do people get colds when they come to the ashram and others get sick? How can we overcome this?

Do not try to overcome it. Only if the condition gets bad should you pay special attention to it, otherwise, this type of physical purification is quite natural in an ashram, apart from the effects of the climate, the food and the water. Many Indians too, who live in Munger find their noses running, or something running in their bodies when they come to Ganga Darshan.

Somebody once asked Sri Swamiji the same question. He said that we live in a society where there is always some kind of tension, which may even be very subtle, but it is there. When we find ourselves in a different environment from the one we

are used to, somehow something happens to the personality. The process of purification begins, even if it is just momentary. It may happen just for ten minutes, or for one day, or for three or ten days. It is all right. One should go through that process because it is an adjustment of the mind from one environment to another. This adjustment creates a reaction in the body and, of course, we know what kind of reaction we might have in the mind. It is good if we encourage it.

Why is it necessary to practise pranayama after asana and not before?

It is necessary because of a very simple reason. When you practise asana, the dynamic physiological activity excites the pranas which affects the whole body. When you practise asana, what is the first thing that you notice? Generation of heat in the body, stimulation of the various organs of the body, alertness of the mind, balanced activity of the internal organs, change in the patterns of breathing.

By performing pranayama after the asana practice, you relax your physiological and pranic systems and if there is any imbalanced activity in the pranic field then you balance that out. There are some practitioners to whom the guru suggests the practice of pranayama before asanas, but this only happens in a few cases and is done under the guidance of the guru. However, the common sequence is asana first, pranayama second, and the other practices of relaxation and meditation to follow.

What is the best way to get into yoga therapy and is it possible if you have had no previous medical experience?

Yoga therapy is very simple because the principles are based on the knowledge of the body. We know of two types of illness: diseases that begin in the body and are vital in nature, and diseases that begin in the mind and are psychic in nature; psychosomatic and somo-psychic illness.

The treatment of these two types of illness is slightly different in yoga. First, we have to find out what the problem

is and to which category it belongs. Does it belong to the level of the body or does it belong to the level of the mind? We have seen some cases of cancer improve through the practice of yoga because the problem was mental: fear, anxiety, negative thinking. Once we eliminate the root cause, the healing slowly begins in the body. There are some cases in which the theory of mind over matter does not really work, either because the problem has intensified to such an extent that there is no reversing it, or because we do not know how to use the power of mind over matter.

If the problem is physical we can deal with it through the practice of hatha yoga; if it is mental we use the practices of raja yoga. Of course, sometimes we have to combine both practices. If the patient has a medical background, so much the better, because it will give a better insight into the problem. This knowledge will definitely help in yoga therapy. If I have diabetes and I do not know that my pancreas and liver and other parts are affected, I may do some practise thinking that it may help, but actually I may be aggravating that problem.

I might have both hypertension and diabetes. I know that for diabetes the headstand is good, but for hypertension it is detrimental. This type of knowledge is necessary, but more than that, knowledge of the actual physical state of the patient is necessary.

A yoga therapist has the considerable responsibility of ensuring that the treatment is correct. It is not a question of trial and error. From the very first stage, you have to be certain which practice is beneficial for the disease, and it is better to start from scratch. To do that you will have to come to live here for twelve years and then you will find out.

Is it possible to devote my life to the search for spiritual enlightenment without foregoing my family, friends, social life and career? If so, how can it be achieved?

We have to understand the concept of spirituality. It is not standing on the head which makes one spiritual, nor is it

thinking good things all the time, taking sannyasa or having faith in God in one way or the other.

Sannyasins follow a type of spiritual life and householders follow another. Previously we had ideas that in eastern countries there is a lot of spirituality and in western countries there is a lot of material demand. That is absolutely false. Spirituality means getting in touch with one's spirit, with one's own unique nature or consciousness. How do we go about this? Not by practising meditation, reading scriptures, performing certain austerities and sadhana, or by any other methods does one become spiritual. It is when there is a feeling of something internal happening, some internal link being created between you and your higher self.

This experience will differ from person to person. You might be able to have it through meditation, through performing some type of external ritual, like going to a temple, church or mosque every Sunday. Everybody has their own way, but the concept of spirituality in yoga is actually based on two principles, and these two principles are viveka and vairagya.

Viveka means right understanding, or right knowledge, knowledge which is okay for you or which goes according to your personality. *Vairagya* means detachment. Detachment here does not mean renunciation; it is simply not being attached to our expectations. We all have expectations in life, and when we are unable to fulfil our expectations, we suffer. There is a setback. We all have our likes and dislikes and we always want things to go our way, as per our liking and not according to our dislikes.

What should the diet be for an advanced practitioner?

There are many different views on what one should eat and what one should not eat. Even in yogic philosophy food has been classified as sattwic, rajasic and tamasic or simple, royal and lethargic. However, the best diet for an advanced practitioner of yoga is the diet recommended by common sense. There is no such thing as a specific yogic diet,

although, taking into consideration different physiological conditions and psychological states, various forms of diet are recommended for the spiritual aspirant performing yogic sadhana.

Generally, here in India, most of the people are vegetarian. In western countries, most people are non-vegetarian and yet they practise yoga, and many of them are highly advanced practitioners following the yogic lifestyle. Thus we cannot really say that becoming a vegetarian is conducive to the attainment of yogic health or yogic benefits. The only restriction in yoga and the only rule in yoga is that, before any practice the stomach has to be empty; what you eat is a different matter.

If you are a perfectly healthy being, you can eat and digest anything, stones and grass and steel and wood. There is only one simple principle. Eat whatever you can digest easily. Whatever you eat should leave your stomach in about three hours. If you eat something which stays in your stomach for more than three hours and affects your digestion, then that is a wrong diet. So you can decide for yourself what type of diet you will have.

What happens to the physical body, to the subtle body and to the causal body at the time of yoga nidra?

First of all, the gross physical body reaches a state of complete relaxation: there is harmony, balance, equilibrium; an awareness of the physiological activities and state of the various internal organs; release of tension and the unhampered flow of prana. With the awareness and alertness of mind which we gain at the time of yoga nidra, we go deep into our mind.

The subtle body is not like a physical body which lies beside you at the time of yoga nidra practise. It is not something you can look at and say, "This is happening to my subtle body." Your causal body is not like your physical body. The subtle body and the causal body are states of mind, states of internal experience. You can consider them to be a part of your subconscious and unconscious personalities.

In yoga nidra you go deeper into your personality. You discover the various phases of your nature, and remove the blockages that lie within your mind, personality, behaviour, thoughts, feelings and emotions. That is how you work through the subtle and causal personalities. If you want to know more about it, please read the book, *Yoga Nidra* and you will get all the details.

What is the relationship between science and yoga?

What is the relationship between you and your father? The same. Yoga, although it is an ancient system of attaining physiological, psychological and psychic harmony, is the most effective form of psychotherapy. It is the most effective tonic to bring about harmony, balance, and coordination in the functions of the different physiological systems.

If you look at any of the yogic texts you will find the texts to be very practical in nature. There are certain theoretical aspects of yoga which define the nature of our inner personality, consciousness and energy, and in general most of the yogic practices and texts are very practical. They deal with the very down-to-earth problems of daily life; how to relieve physical tensions, internal stress and anxiety; how to correct behaviour; how to correct one's thinking process; how to know one's emotions and feelings; how to deal with the negative side of our personality, and so forth.

Science today is trying to provide the same thing through other means. It is also trying to give us an understanding of our capacities and qualities of the body and mind, and is being helped by yoga in many spheres, especially that of determining the nature of human consciousness and energy. Science is taking the help of the knowledge gained by yogic scientists many hundreds and thousands of years ago. Therefore, today we can say that there is hardly any difference between science and yoga.

There are two aspects of science: the gross and the subtle, the material and the transcendental. In the gross aspect we see all the technology which has grown up

around us, all the facilities, all the advancements that man has made in the field of medicine, space, communication and so forth. In the subtle aspect we hear of so much research around the world in the different fields of social life: education, correction of personality problems and behaviour, mental analysis, determining of the role of human consciousness, trying to understand the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind.

Yoga has always provided an answer to the subtle area of science. After working with the subtle area, we can eventually develop the material world too, as we come to know about ourselves and gain control over the different manifestations of our mind and personality.

Is there a field of energy connecting the guru with the disciple at all times, and if so, how can the disciple maintain a constant, conscious awareness of this?

When it comes to talking about the link between guru and disciple my mind generally goes blank, because it is something which I feel I have not yet properly understood. Do we consider the guru to be a person or a source of inspiration and energy? If we consider the guru to be a person in the physical aspect then there is, of course, an emotional attachment. If we consider the guru to be a source of inspiration and energy, then the guru awakens that source of inspiration and energy within us.

We live with the guru and his energy, or the energy is transmitted by some means whether through sadhana, meditation or any other method the guru may choose to utilize. In the process we may go through many head trips, but the final stage is the awakening of the guru's energy within the personality. If I have the ability to experience the guru's energy, then that source of inspiration will be transmitted, and it will not be necessary for me to maintain a constant awareness that I am one with the guru. It is just enough to say that the current is flowing through the wires and we only have to turn on the switch and turn off the switch. When we turn

off the switch the bulb is powerless, but when we turn on the switch the bulb radiates light.

The guru is simply a guide who can inspire us to move in a particular direction. After he has given us the first push he does not lift and carry us. We have to rely on our own two legs to walk. When the awareness is there, the link is there and this awareness comes after there has been a fusion of the guru's mind with the mind of the aspirant, despite how limited or confined it may be.

We hear many stories and examples of people who have never seen their guru, yet the guru has been able to transmit the power, and they experience him every day. On the other hand, there are living examples of many who live with the guru for years and who are unable to understand or experience this energy.

At one level, the consciousness of everyone is united and we can link ourselves with any and every person from that level. We also have the ability to project that consciousness in day-to-day activities. The link between guru and disciple is a subtle link which exists whether one is aware of it or not. It is an unconscious link which is there for all time unless we shut off our own switch.

I have been practising pooja and japa for some years, but still I do not have peace of mind. How long does it take?

You are a brilliant example of one of those pandits of Mathura. You may not know them but you are a true replica of them. I will tell you the story. Four pandits from Mathura decided to go on a trip, and before embarking they took a big shot of ganja. They went to the river Yamuna, got into the boat and started to row. Evening came, but they continued rowing until the next morning. The whole night they rowed and rowed and rowed. When dawn came one of the pandits looked around and said, "Ah, the world is very small. Wherever we travel we always find the same scenery. We have rowed for twelve hours and still the scenery has not changed. It looks like our own Mathura; the same river bank, the same

type of trees, the same type of houses, mountains, everything is the same.” It was morning. People started coming for their bath and saw these four people rowing the boat. One of the pandits from the boat looked at the people taking their bath and said, “I recognize some of those people taking their bath, but how did they come to be here? They are supposed to be back home in Mathura.” What had happened was that, even though they had a boat and they rowed the whole night, they had forgotten to untie the boat from the pier.

This question of practising mantra and japa for a long time and still not finding peace of mind is a classic illustration of this story. You have all the necessary tools, but you have missed something. I will let you find that out for yourself. You see, many people have taken mantra diksha. It is also necessary for them to know what type of sadhana they can do in their personal lives. I will tell you some basic rules. The questioner can try to figure out his mistake from these.

Repetition of mantra should not involve any type of effort from the side of the practitioner. It should be an effortless repetition and it should be a constant thing. Just as you get up in the morning, go to the toilet, have breakfast, lunch and dinner, repetition of your mantra should also become a part of your day-to-day activity, not for one hour or half an hour but for five or ten minutes.

When you have a headache, how many aspirin tablets do you take, one or twenty? You take one, or maximum, two. In the same way, whether it is mantra japa or any type of sadhana, if you do it for a short period of time, with proper concentration and attitude of mind, it will have far-reaching effects, more than one hour of mantra repetition which you do by forcing yourself, and thus remaining disturbed or distracted. Just five minutes, one tablet of mantra. It should be daily, it should become a routine.

Second, never try to stop the mind. Generally what happens is that, when you to do your mantra and thoughts come, you spend more time fighting with the thoughts and trying to cope with them, and less time with the repetition

of the mantra. You become more aware of what you are thinking and your own anxiety. The fight should not be there; you should be totally relaxed. If thoughts arise at the time of mantra meditation, well and good, just accept them, but do not break your concentration from the mantra.

Traditionally, there are three ways for repeating a mantra: verbally, mentally and whispered. People usually do mental repetition of mantra, but since you are unable to have proper control over the mind, it is quite easy for your concentration to be broken from time to time. When this begins to happen, verbal repetition of the mantra should be practised. If by practising mental mantra you find that too many thoughts are coming, and you are unable to concentrate on the mantra or the mala, then stop, switch over to either whispering or verbal repetition in order to concentrate the mind.

The mala is definitely an important item in your practices, because it will give you a better hold on the mantra. As long as you have the mala in your hand, you will be aware that you are repeating the mantra one bead at a time, one mantra at a time. There will be less mental distraction, and unless you have an incurable case of anxiety and nervousness, you will be able to find proper mental balance with the repetition of the mantra and movement of the mala combined.

Initially, no set timing is required for the repetition of a mantra. You can repeat it any time, morning, afternoon, evening and night, but try to be regular in your repetition at that particular time every day. Morning, afternoon, evening or night, it does not matter at all; fix it according to your convenience. It is not necessary that you repeat the mantra in the morning only; you can do it at night also or during the afternoon.

The place of practice is important. When you fix a place in your house or room for repeating the mantra you will create a positive vibration around that place, which will be conducive to the attainment of mental harmony, stability and peace when you are practising the mantra. Fixing a place is necessary for people who are sincerely interested

in continuing with mantra japa. Otherwise, there are no restrictions. You can do it anytime during the day while walking, eating, talking, playing, jumping or sitting; you can constantly repeat the mantra mentally. While walking on the road repeat the mantra mentally, while sitting down in a chair all by yourself, repeat the mantra mentally. It is not even necessary to close the eyes, keep the eyes open but have the consciousness of the mantra continuously going on inside you. These are the basic rules of mantra which you should remember and try to follow as best as you can.

What is prana vidya? How can you help people through prana vidya?

In brief, *prana* is the name of the vital energy governing the entire physio-psychological system of the personality and it has different manifestations. Some manifestations can be seen and felt physically and psychically, but some, which are beyond the range of our perception, cannot be experienced by us, and even if we do experience them we are unable to understand them. According to some yogic theories, the electromagnetic energy in our body and brain is part of this pranic energy. Prana represents the vital aspect, the dynamic aspect which makes the body move, which makes the body and the mind act, causing desires, feelings, emotions and sentiments.

All the aspects of our personality are governed by prana, whether gross or subtle, internal, rational or intuitive. Our pranic energy at this moment is almost in a state of inactivity. It is active within us but we are not utilizing its full capacity. Just as we clear the gutter to improve the flow of water, in the same way, in order to make the prana flow in our system, we have to prepare and clean our internal pranic system through the practices of asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and so on. When we are able to do that, and when there is an unrestricted flow of prana throughout our system, this awakening in the pranic level stimulates the dormant brain centres and awakens them. When these dormant centres

awaken we gain control over many unknown manifestations and qualities of life.

Prana vidya is literally the 'science of healing'. You can heal a person through the transmission of prana over a distance, and also through a direct transmission of prana, person to person, sitting close by. There are many aspects of prana vidya. In order to understand the principles involved, we must first understand the chakras, kundalini and the practices of kriya and kundalini yoga. Only then can we understand it properly, not before that.

What is the best time for practising asana and pranayama?

Between four and six in the morning, this is the traditional time. Why? The body is rested, the atmosphere is relatively free from pollution, the air is full of life-giving negative ions and oxygen, and it is fresh. Therefore, performing the practices of asana and pranayama at that time is considered to be most beneficial. Of course, for many people this may not be possible, so certain changes have to be made depending on their lifestyle.

There are certain rules concerning asana and pranayama. The stomach has to be empty. The best time is either before taking breakfast, lunch or dinner, at least three hours after having taken the previous meal. Depending on your requirements your teacher should be able to guide you more in this line, but you can adjust the timings too. It is not necessary to have an empty stomach for the practice of pranayama, so it can be done later on during the day, or in the evening; do the asanas in the morning. Simply remember the basic rule; an empty stomach at the time of asana practice leads to a healthy life.

When the totality of a person's nature comes to the surface with excessive strength, is it possible to relate this condition with swadhisthana chakra?

The totality of a person's nature coming to the surface with excessive strength only happens when there is some kind

of explosion inside. It might be an emotional explosion, an intellectual explosion, or a psychic explosion. If it happens because of an emotional explosion, hyperactivity, then it would not represent swadhisthana but a gross manifestation of anahata chakra. If it happens due to intellectual intensity then it would represent the gross manifestation of ajna chakra. An intellectual outburst is the outcome of a fight between ideas and concepts. If it happens due to a psychic explosion then it would be the awakening of ajna chakra. If suddenly there is awakening of swadhisthana, we would find that a lot of suppressed items like guilt, fear, suppressed sexual desires and samskaras; the karmas will manifest.

When I came to the ashram, I did not like the food, but now I feel this is the real food for me and I am enjoying it very much. I am very happy here and getting peace of mind. Please tell me how to maintain this bliss and peace in the future?

There is nothing unique about this ashram and there will be nothing unique about your home. They are both the same. The only difference is that here we follow an ancient tradition, which is known as gurukul. In this tradition, kings and beggars both come to live and study under the shelter of the guru for fifteen days, twenty days, one month, one year, two years or twelve years. They share the same happiness, the same conflicts, rights, tensions, joy and wellbeing and after the completion of their study, they go back to their respective jobs, families and countries.

The basis of ashram life is karma yoga, discipline, determination, and the attitude of seva. Many times we cannot follow it but we try anyway, because as long as we have certain goals in front of us and we move in the same direction, we find that there is happiness and satisfaction, even amidst conflicting and tense situations.

If you can maintain a certain discipline in your life, keep regular timings of yoga practice, waking up, sleeping, eating, drinking then you will still find the same type of enjoyment

that you desire, in your own home. If you can inspire others in your family, then you can also create an ashram atmosphere at home. Then you will feel that you have never left Munger.

We want to do a few rounds of surya namaskara, a few sitting, standing, bending, inverted and some more dynamic asana, pranayama and all the kriyas. How can we do all these with breath awareness along with relaxation in one or two hours?

Well, if you can ask that question, it means that you have not really understood the process of yoga. It does not matter whether you can perform difficult asanas or not, it does not matter if you can do the headstand, inverted postures or dynamic postures. It matters that you have awareness, first of all, concerning the limitations of the body and mind. Once you are aware of your body and mind, you will find that they both respond to any type of instruction that you give them.

Start gradually with simple practices. As far as the teaching of different practices is concerned, we can do it, but you will not really gain anything from it, that is a guarantee. You may feel happy that you have been able to do this exercise in your physical condition at your age. You may feel satisfied, but that is not the aim of yoga.

The aim of yoga is to create an awareness of the body, mind and spirit, and in order to do that we first have to know what our body needs. We have to know when there is tension in our little toe, tightness in a muscle behind the kneecap. You have to develop an awareness of each and every part of the body, and that is why we emphasize the practice of pawanmuktasana so much, not because we do not know other asanas apart from pawanmuktasana, but because we have seen that it is very useful in the later practices of yoga. It helps to develop a balanced frame of mind and body, thus enabling one to perform other techniques with a lot of ease. It is not a matter of who can quickly touch the toes, or who can have fantastic experiences. It is a matter of rediscovering yourself from the very beginning.

Gradually, in the course of time, you can include other dynamic and advanced practices of yoga, and you will find that your body responds to these difficult postures with grace and ease. When the body responds in this way, then you derive a lot of benefits from the practices too. If the body does not respond but you do the practices with force or strain you will get a back pain or a neck crank. Go easy, go slow, and as you develop awareness of yourself, go into other practices.

Sometimes I become confused regarding ‘spirituality’, and ‘religion’ in relation to the practices and philosophy of yoga. Can you clarify?

First of all, we have to define what spirituality is, because many times people confuse spirituality with religious teachings, with morality, the concept of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. They believe that to be spiritual one has to be perfect; one cannot tell a lie any more, one cannot harm anybody.

Honesty, truthfulness, celibacy, faith in God, right understanding and right knowledge are different aspects of spirituality. According to yogic philosophy, however, spirituality means a perfect balance in the inner personality, which leads to the awakening of the dormant and hidden faculties, as well as to the development of the different areas of consciousness. As our consciousness evolves, we are able to understand our own religion, philosophy and thoughts in a much better way, and we are able to implement the teachings of our religion in a much more efficient way.

Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Jains practise yoga, people from all walks of life and religions practise yoga. The first activity of our ashram in South America was to teach yoga to the Catholic priests in different monasteries and convents. In fact, the whole setup in South America was sponsored by the church, and every month we used to go to different convents, monasteries and churches and teach yoga to the nuns and priests. They found that it did not contradict any of their thoughts or beliefs, rather it gave them a greater

understanding of their own faith and philosophy, and they could then implement the teachings of their own religion in a much better way.

Yoga has always maintained that, regardless of religious, moral or philosophical differences, consciousness is one, energy is one, and we have to develop the consciousness and awaken the energy. How do we develop consciousness?

In psychology we hear about the conscious, subconscious and unconscious minds. In yoga we have defined three states of consciousness: *jagrat*, wakefulness, *swapna*, dream-like states, and *nidra*, dormant state. This is the traditional ancient classification of the human mind in yoga, which relates to the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind today.

Yoga further states that these different areas of mind have to be known. We have to know what our thoughts are. We have to know our feelings and emotions. We have to know what lies within our personality, and transcend it. As we transcend the limitations of mind, we develop our awareness; we develop the dormant faculties, the qualities and energies. When we are in control of our faculties and mind, only then do we enter into spiritual ground.

The concept of spirituality in yoga is to establish ourselves in our own inner nature, and in order to do that we have to go beyond the mind; we have to become the master of our mind. Right now the mind is our master. Sometimes the mind says, “Do this” so we do it, “Like this” and we like it, “Dislike that” and we dislike it. In this process of becoming the master of our own mind, the awakening which takes place is known as the spiritual awakening.

That is the yogic concept of spirituality. Otherwise everybody is free to have their own belief, their own religion, and we are famous for our propagation of the freedom of religion. Some people believe in Rama, some in Krishna, some in Christ, some in Buddha, some in Mohammed and some in Mahavir. Therefore, continue with your own beliefs and philosophy along with your yoga practices which will help you evolve your mind.

Though the chakras exist on the psychic level, can a surgical operation affect them?

Just as we remove our tonsils, it would be nice if we could remove mooladhara and swadhisthana, but unfortunately it does not happen that way. Surgery will not affect the activity of a chakra, because chakras are located in the psychic body, even though experiences take place at the level of the brain.

Through the brain we can experience the awakening of the chakras in different centres of the body where there are nerve plexuses. The awakening of mooladhara does not take place in the perineum but in the brain. However, the perineum is connected with the brain. Therefore, the awakening will be experienced at the bottom of the spinal cord. Even if you do not have a spine, mooladhara will awaken in the brain, and then, from there the awakening of consciousness will take place.

What meditative asanas are necessary for common sadhakas?

For common sadhakas it is necessary first to prepare the body. We all fall into this common category. We are not exceptional sadhakas and it is necessary for us to prepare our bodies through the practices of simple asanas, hatha yoga and pranayama. After we have attained flexibility and looseness in the physical joints, we can adopt any meditation pose which is conducive to concentration of mind, and which can give us a feeling of tranquillity and vitality.

There are certain yogic asanas which are meant specifically for sadhana and meditation, including padmasana, siddhasana, veerasana, siddha yoni asana, and sukhasana. They are adopted as per the requirement of the practitioner. For a person who is doing simple practices of concentration and meditation, the practice of sukhasana, vajrasana and veerasana are good, and effective. For a person who is involved in advanced practices of concentration, padmasana is good. For one engaged in trying to raise the kundalini, or

trying to develop pranic energy, siddhasana and siddha yoni asana are recommended.

For different categories of sadhana there are different asanas, and this can be given to you by your guru. He will give you your personal sadhana and will watch your progress at the time of sadhana.

Can kriya yoga be used within the Christian faith?

Of course! That is like asking if technology can be used within the Indian culture. Whether we manufacture cars in India, America, Japan, Australia or England, the technology is the same. The only thing which might change is the model; even the latest cars in India are 1956 Ambassador Models with a little bit of refinement!

Yoga is applicable to everybody as it deals with finding the balance in our personality. It deals with rediscovering ourselves, learning that we are something more than we seem to be. If I am something more than I seem, who am I? Am I just this limited 'me' that you and I see me to be, or is there a greater power, a greater energy within me which can express itself?

This discovery is not limited, and the techniques that are applied to attain this awareness are not confined to any particular faith or culture. It is a human process and will continue even after all faiths and beliefs have been eradicated from this planet. Maybe it will not have the name 'yoga' then. It might be called 'bhoga', but the principles will be the same, the techniques will be the same and that is more important, because we are concerned with discovering ourselves. After that we can help others in finding themselves.

At what age should children be introduced to yoga and how?

Generally, according to the theory of yoga, children can start the simple yoga practices at around the age of eight, because eight is considered to be the time when some maturity has been reached in the glandular and hormonal

activity, although the process of growth continues until around the age of twenty.

In the Indian tradition there is a vedic samskara known as the *upanayana samskara*, the thread ceremony. Just as in other religions they have baptism which is performed at a certain age, in a similar manner, this ceremony is typically performed around the age of eight. At that time the child is given a mantra, which is usually the Gayatri mantra, and is taught pranayama which is generally nadi shodhana pranayama. The child is also taught surya namaskara. These practices continue until the age of twelve after which the child can learn other practices of yoga. This system has existed in the Indian tradition for a long time and we also recommend the same.

What is the ideal guru and shishya relationship?

I do not know about the ideal guru, but I definitely know about the ideal *shishya*, or disciple. There is the story of one great disciple called Milarepa. In India we have the story of Ekalavya and Dronacharya. These are ideal disciples, who can without question, surrender themselves completely to the will of their guru, realizing that the will of God flows through him; he is the transmitter and we are the receivers.

When Dronacharya asked Ekalavya to cut off his thumb, he did it without questioning it at all. If you or I had been in his place, what would we have done? We would have said, "This guru is cracked!" If Marpa, the guru of Milarepa, had not instructed him in hard karma yoga, and if he had not abused him, then Milarepa would not have changed.

Many gurus have come and gone in this world and the world does not really care for them, but a few gurus are outstanding. Milarepa was one of these, because he was an ideal disciple of his guru, Marpa, and the ideal disciple later on becomes the ideal guru.

There is no precise answer to this question. The link between a guru and disciple is not a physical or external link, but a link which is internal, which is beyond the limitations

and concepts of time and space. If you have read the book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, you will also have read that passage where Paramahansa Yogananda experienced the vision of his guru at the time of his guru's death. He was not in India at that time, and when he returned to India his guru had already expired. Paramahansa Yogananda was staying at a hotel in Bombay the night he heard that his guru had expired. The same night he had an actual vision of him in flesh and blood! He touched him and spoke with him. That is the type of relationship an ideal disciple has with his guru, and space and time do not matter.

This ideal relationship only comes when you surrender yourself completely, not only in things that you like, but also in things that you dislike. If you go with the guru to a hotel and have good food you will say, "Oh yes, this guru is very wealthy, he is very nice." However, if the guru decides to drink molten glass, would you drink it? No. Your guru is drinking it so why not you?

At the level of like and dislike we tend to accept the guru according to the idea that we have created of how he should be for us. We want to manipulate the guru to suit our individual needs, but a real disciple and a real guru are those who can recognize every type of quality in each other, and be one with each other in every action, in every thought, no matter whether they are near or far. If you can have that type of relationship, you will be an ideal shishya.

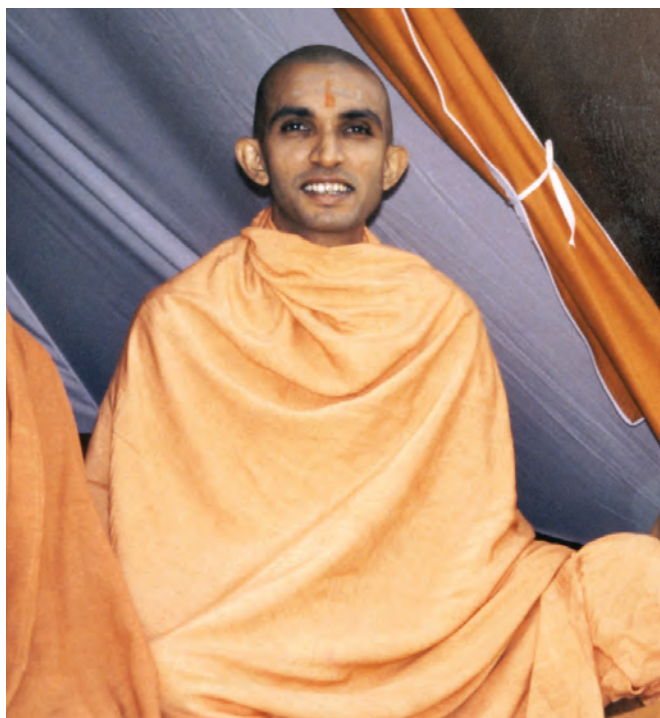
Is it necessary to have an ishta and what is its link with guru?

Generally, people confuse ishta with a form of God or a deity. However, in Sanskrit *iti tishta* or *ishta* means here you stay. *Iti* means here and *tishta* means to sit or to stay.

Ishta is the symbol which is utilized during meditation; a point on which you can fix the mind. This point or image can be any object or any abstract visual idea which represents a positive quality. However, the traditional concept of ishta is that of a deity representing a positive quality within oneself.

Having a symbol is necessary, because while one is meditating different things are happening inside. There is awareness of the body aches and pains, of the mantra in the different levels of thought, of the movement of the mala, and of the external environment. In order to stop the mind diverting to different objects of attention, to stop the function of the vrittis, a symbol is used representing an idea, a concept, and a quality with which we can identify.

The guru can be the symbol upon which the mind is fixed, and once this fixation has taken place it becomes the form of your ishta. Any object can become the form of your ishta such as a stone, a tree, or scenery; something with which you are able to identify completely, on which you are able to fix your attention for extended periods.



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Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati during the eighties and nineties.

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ISBN : 978-93-81620-20-5